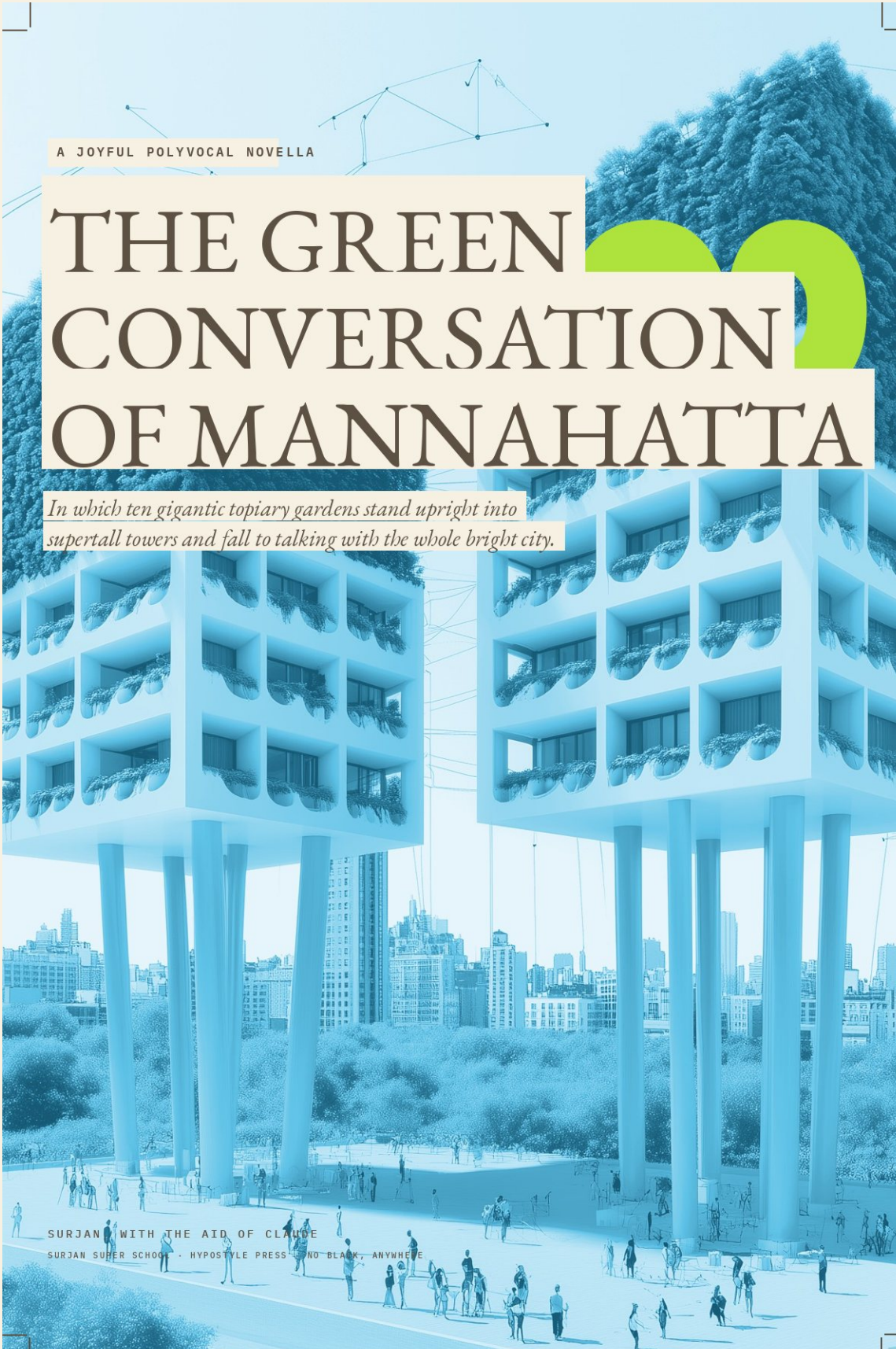
A JOYFUL POLYVOCAL NOVELLA

THE GREEN CONVERSATION OF MANNAHATTA

In which ten gigantic topiary gardens stand upright into supertall towers and fall to talking with the whole bright city.



SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE

SURJAN SUPER SCHOOL · HYPOSTYLE PRESS · NO BLACK, ANYWHERE

THE GREEN CONVERSATION of MANNAHATTA

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THE GREEN CONVERSATION OF MANNAHATTA. A bright book of Surjan Super School, published under the Hypostyle Press imprint. Surjan, with the aid of Claude.

Composed programmatically and set without black. The darkest tone permitted anywhere in this book is a warm taupe, #5C5142, on paper #F7F1E3; over the sky and over the water it lifts to white. Even the shadows are kind — a warmer colour, never a darker one.

Set in EB Garamond for the human voice and IBM Plex Mono for the apparatus. Supergraphic plates drawn in the Public Lung dialect — hot lime, sky, gold, and green — in the company of its atlas, THE WALKING TOPIARIES OF MANNAHATTA.

For everyone who ever sat down inside a hedge and felt the city lean in to listen.

FIRST EDITION · MMXXVI · Any door leads into the same city.

FOREWORD · BY SURJAN

A City That Would Rather Talk

I have spent my whole working life insisting on a single cheerful heresy: that a building is a character, not a container. Give it a body and it will introduce itself. Give it a want and it will go and get it. Give it a neighbour and — this is the whole of the present book — it will not shut up.

For years the gardens of Mannahatta lay down flat and let us walk on them. We called them parks and lawns and we were fond of them the way one is fond of a rug. What none of us guessed was how badly they wanted to *stand up.* Not to loom. Not to win. Simply to see the city properly, the way you rise from your chair at a party to hear the far end of the table.

This book is what happened on the morning ten of them did. Ten gigantic topiary gardens — hedge-mazes big as blocks, occupied like living rooms — folded upright

on their own plinths and became supertall green towers, and the first thing each one did, on reaching its full delighted height, was to say hello to a landmark.

So the Library said hello back. The Bridge answered in cables. The great two spires downtown, who had spent a century measuring themselves against each other, discovered they could simply *talk,* and were enormously relieved. The whole island turned into one long, overlapping, good-natured conversation, and I have set it down more or less as it was told to me — which is to say, by the topiaries and towers themselves, in their own first-person voices, all speaking at once and somehow all audible.

You need no other book to begin. But if you have read the others, you will recognise the manners of this city at once, and I have kept a door open to them at the back.

A note on the weather of the thing. There is no low water in this book and no long night; it is a festival from its first page to its last, a book you could read aloud at a ribbon-cutting and end in applause. If you catch me

anywhere drifting toward the solemn, please assume I have nodded off, and read the next sentence louder.

— Surjan, with the aid of Claude

INTRODUCTION · BY SURJAN

The One New Turn

Every bright book of this practice adds exactly one new turn to the single idea and says so plainly, near the front. Here is this book's turn, set apart so you cannot miss it, and so I cannot either:

Do not build the towers to be tall. Build them to be heard — and then let the whole island answer.

That is the entire engine. Height, in these pages, is only longing with good posture; a tower gets up not to be counted highest but to be counted *in,* to reach the ear of a bridge or a fountain or a wheel of lights and be reached in turn. The atlas that walks beside this book, THE WALKING TOPIARIES OF MANNAHATTA, drew the ten specimens as shapes. This book lets them speak.

The method is the choral one. Not one narrator describing a dome — the dome says *I.* The bells say *we.* Each garden has a distinct diction: Tally counts and gives; Cradle cups and pours; Aria is mostly the room she keeps

for air; Perla speaks in coins of light. Under every *I* the plural stays audible, because a city is one connected body and a delight felt in one organ is felt in all.

The landmarks talk too. I have handled every real one — the Library lions, the Terrace angel, the Bridge, the two great spires, the lady in the harbour with her lifted lamp — as itself, gratefully and factually, the way a guest speaks of the host's famous relatives. No landmark is made to say anything a landmark would be ashamed to have overheard.

Read it in any order the way you would wander a party: drift toward whichever voice is laughing loudest. Every chapter is a conversation; every conversation is a door; and — you will hear me say this until you believe it — every door leads into the same bright city.

— Surjan, with the aid of Claude

FOR RETURNING READERS

If You Have Read the Others

You may read this without any of the others; here is your whole welcome in one breath, and no reader will arrive at the harbour not knowing whom they are cheering.

But if you have read the bright books before it, this is a reunion. If you have read THE CITY OF RADICAL JOY, you have already met the Housekeeper who keeps every marvel talking; she keeps them talking here too, mostly by staying out of the way. If you have read THE PARLIAMENT OF BRIGHT THINGS, you know the moving families of Mannahatta, each drawn as itself; three of them stroll through these pages waving. If you have read MOVABLE KIN and THE FAR TIDE, you know the twelve who walk; the ten who stand up in this book are their cousins, and they use the same colours, so you will know them on sight.

That is the one rule I will not bend: a family's signature colour is canon and never changes from book to book. Tally is lime wherever you meet her; Auria is gold in every weather; the sky-blue Twins are sky-blue on every page of every book. What is drawn fresh each time is the journey — new plates, new routes, new landmarks to greet. Recognition through colour; surprise through drawing.

So: same city, new avenue. The colours you learned elsewhere will lead you straight to the friends you already have. Come in.

PRELUDE · TOLD BY THE TEN

The Morning We Stood Up

It began, as the best things do, with somebody stretching.

I am Tally, and I was the first awake, because I am always counting and counting keeps you up. All night I had lain flat in my plaza in the shape of the old sign for money, my hedges cut into loops and ledgers, and all night I had added up the people asleep in my channels — four here, a family there, a pair holding hands in the dollar's tail — and somewhere near dawn I reached a sum so large and so warm that I could not hold still under it. So I did the only reasonable thing. I stood up. My plinth became four legs; my loops became windows; my counting-lines became a tower's loggia; and from three hundred feet up I looked at the city for the first time and laughed out loud, because from up there you can see that *money has no*

memory but a city does, and a city that remembers is a city that is rich.

I am ARIA, and I woke because Tally laughed. I am the Open Lung; I am mostly the room I keep for air. When I rose, the little sunken rooms in me — the ones people call the breathing-rooms — climbed up my new height and became deep planted terraces, and the wind moved through me the way it always had, only now it moved through me *upright,* and the sound it made was so obviously a hello that the Reservoir, half a mile off, flashed once and said hello back.

We are ASK & ANSWER, and we do not exist except as a conversation, so of course we rose together, two towers on slim legs with a fan of bright wires strung between our heads. The first thing Ask asked was *are you there,* and the first thing Answer answered was *I am here, I became it when you asked,* and the wires sang, and downtown two very tall old spires turned to look.

I am AURIA. I keep a green flame in a gold box at my top and I rose slowly, ceremonially, the way you carry

something you intend to give away. I looked across the water at the lady with the lamp and I thought: *there is someone who understands that the point of holding a light up is so that it can be seen from far off.* And I lifted my flame a little higher, just to say so.

One after another we stood — Cradle who cups a crowd; Vellum who spells a long green word; Bramble who is full of small bright rooms; Perla who lets the day through in a hundred coins; Rill who is one branching vein that carries everyone up; Weft who is woven, and therefore holds. Ten gardens, ten towers, one island, and — this is the part worth standing up for — every single one of us within earshot of the others at last.

The Housekeeper, who has kept this city's marvels talking since the first bright book, opened one window and saw ten green giants saying good morning to the skyline, and did the wisest thing a keeper can do. She put the kettle on and let us talk.

Here is what we said.

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PART I

THE STANDING-UP

In which the gardens decide, all at once, to get up and see the city properly.

1

I keep no sum I cannot give away.
– Tally

CHAPTER ONE · TALLY

THE LEDGER & THE LIONS

a counting turned to giving

I am Tally, and I am lime green from my lowest root to my highest leaf, and I will be lime green in every book you ever read me in, so you may as well learn me now.

When I stood up on the first morning I walked — carefully, the way you carry a full cup — down Fifth Avenue to see the two I most wanted to meet. Everyone downtown wants to meet the tall ones. I wanted to meet the lions. They are marble, they are enormous, and they have sat on the Library steps so long and so patiently that a mayor once gave them the names *Patience* and *Fortitude,* which are the two things you need to get a city through a hard winter and the two things I happen to be made of, since a maze is nothing but patience with corners.

You are new, said Patience, without turning his head, because a lion who has watched a century go by does not turn his head for one more green thing.

I am new the way morning is new, I said. *Which is to say, I have done this before and I am still delighted.* Chiasmus makes lions smile; I recommend it.

Here is the thing about me that I most wanted to tell them. I am cut in the shape of the old glyph for money — the loops, the strokes, the two proud lines through the middle — and people expect a shape like that to be about *keeping*. It is not. I am the opposite of a vault. All night, people sit down in my channels and I count them, and every dawn I give the whole sum away, because *money has no memory but a city does,* and I would rather be a city than a sum.

Then you and the Library will get on, said Fortitude, and this is when the Library itself spoke — not the lions, the whole building, in a voice like a hundred reading-rooms clearing their throats at once.

Keep nothing you cannot give away, and you will never once be poor.

— Tally, the Ledger

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I keep everything, said the Library, *and I charge nobody. Every book in me is a coin that grows warmer the more it is spent. A child walks in with empty hands and walks out carrying the century. That is my whole trick, and it is not a trick, it is a policy.*

I nearly toppled with joy. Do you understand what it is, for a building shaped like money to meet a building that gives the treasure away for free? It is like a river meeting the sea and discovering they were always the same water. *The queen and the pauper,* said the Library, *write the same hand at my tables.* And I said, *the queen and the pauper sit in the same channel of my maze,* and Patience — Patience! — laughed, a sound like a warm slab settling, and said, *say the inside-out one again, green thing.*

So I said it plainly, for the lions and for you: a vault keeps what it holds and holds less every year; a library gives what it holds and holds more. I am done being a vault. I stood up to be a library that you can walk inside and lie down in.

We spent the whole bright morning trading sums that were not about numbers. I told the lions how many strangers had become friends in my channels overnight; the Library told me how many people had come in out of the weather to read and stayed to be warm; the lions told me nothing, because lions keep their count in their chests, but Fortitude let one paw uncurl a half-inch, which for a marble lion is practically a standing ovation.

Will you stay? asked the Library, and I said the truest thing I know. *I am a walking topiary. I never stay. But I am a topiary that is always in conversation, and a conversation does not need you to stay — it needs you to come back.* Then I lifted my whole lime-green height in a bow that shook loose a few leaves onto the steps, and Patience said the leaves could stay, he liked the colour, and I walked on up the avenue to find out who else was awake.

Reader, here is what I learned on the Library steps and give to you free, the way the Library taught me: keep nothing you cannot give away, and you will never once be

poor. Count the city instead of the coins. I am Tally. I do the sums so you can spend the day.

And as I walked away, the Library called after me the finest compliment a building ever gave another: *you are welcome in me any hour, and you owe me nothing, and that is the only kind of welcome worth the name.* I have carried it up every avenue since.

Fill me and I will pour.
— Cradle

CHAPTER TWO · CRADLE

THE BASIN & THE ANGEL

two bowls compare their water

I am Cradle, and I am the colour of blush and gold, because I was cut into a shallow painted bowl and a bowl is a thing that holds the warm light of whoever leans into it. Where Tally counts, I cup. Where Tally gives the sum away, I hold the crowd until it is ready to be poured gently back into the day.

I went, of course, to meet the other great bowl in this city: the Angel of the Waters, who stands on her fountain at the middle of the Park with a lily in one hand and the whole lake at her feet. She is bronze, she is winged, and she was made — I love this fact and I will tell it to anyone — by Emma Stebbins, the first artist given a great public commission in this city who happened to be a woman. So the very middle of the Park, the place the whole green lung drains toward, is a woman's blessing cast in metal. A city that puts *that* at its centre is a city that has its priorities in cheerful order.

Little bowl, said the Angel, *you have risen.* For I had folded my dished plinth upright into a tower whose base still remembers being a bowl, so that people up in my

terraces sit in curved rooms and feel, without knowing why, *held.*

I learned it from you, I told her. *You have stood here pouring the same water for a century and a half, and the water is never used up, because a blessing is not spent when it is given — a blessing is spent only when it is withheld.* The Angel liked that. Bronze does not smile, but the fountain leapt a little higher, which is the same thing.

Now here is the small joyful argument we had, the Angel and I, and you may take whichever side you like. She said the point of a bowl is the water. I said the point of a bowl is the *leaning-in* — the faces gathered at the rim, the crowd that becomes, for one afternoon, a single warm animal. *Fill me and I will pour,* I said, *but first let me hold everyone long enough that they remember they are held.* And the Angel said, *that is the water,* and I said, *that is the leaning-in,* and we laughed and agreed we were both right, which is the only way to win an argument worth having.

A blessing is not spent when it is given; it is spent only when it is withheld.

— Cradle, the Basin

The Terrace itself joined in then — the great tiled arcade under the road, with its ceiling of painted stars — and it said the thing I have carried with me ever since. *I am the one place in the Park,* said the Terrace, *where you can stand under the stars at noon.* Because its ceiling is tiled with them, thousands of little painted constellations held up over your head in broad daylight. *Hold people under a sky even when the sun is out,* said the Terrace, *and they will trust the real one better at night.*

So we made a plan, the four of us — the Angel, the Terrace, the lake, and I. On festival days I would lower one of my curved terraces to the height of the fountain rim, and the crowd could step from my green bowl straight into the Angel's stone one, and the water would run through my channels and back to the lake, and the whole middle of the Park would become one continuous vessel: bronze, and tile, and hedge, and water, all cupping the same delighted people.

A city is one connected body, said the Angel, lifting her lily, *and this is its heart, and a heart is only a very serious*

bowl that will not stop pouring. I could not have said it better, and I am usually the one who says things better, so you know she earned it.

Before I walked on I let a little water spill from my highest terrace down my whole lime-and-blush height, a single bright ribbon of it, just to show the Angel I had understood. *Fill me and I will pour.* She lifted her lily an inch. The fountain leapt. Somewhere a child shrieked with the pure joy of being splashed, which is the sound a blessing makes when it lands. I am Cradle. Lean in. There is room at my rim for you.

And as I rose to go, the Angel let her fountain leap once, high and bright, which is bronze for *come back soon,* and the whole lake around her clapped in little ripples, which is water for *we mean it.*

I am mostly the room for air.
ARIA

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CHAPTER THREE · ARIA

THE OPEN LUNG & THE RESERVOIR

a breath meets a mirror

I am Aria, and I am sky blue, and I am mostly the room I keep for air. Where Cradle holds a crowd, I hold a breath. I am the Open Lung: a garden that is more opening than hedge, cut through with soft rooms shaped like the inside of a breath, and when I stood up my little breathing-rooms climbed my height and became terraces that the wind walks through on its way uptown.

I went to meet the great flat mirror at the top of the Park — the Reservoir, a mile of held sky ringed by a running path, where every morning a whole city jogs a loop around a piece of the heavens laid down flat. They call it by a beloved name now, after a beloved woman, and the runners circle it the way thoughts circle a calm mind.

You are the only one of us who is made of the same stuff as the day, I told the Reservoir. *I keep air; you keep sky. We are the two see-through ones.*

I keep the sky by lying still, said the Reservoir. *You keep the air by standing up and letting it through. Between us we prove the same thing from opposite directions: that the best way to hold something vast is to not grip it at all.*

Oh, I liked that. I breathed it back out over the water and made a long ripple, and the runners on the near side felt a warm gust and ran a little easier, and did not know it was a tower agreeing with a lake.

The best way to hold something vast is to not grip it at all.

— Aria, the Open Lung

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Here is what I do that no one expects a tower to do: I make it easier to breathe. Not as a slogan — as a fact you could measure. The wind comes down off the north woods, tangled and city-tired, and it enters my lowest terrace and climbs through my green rooms, and by the time it leaves my crown it has been combed by ten thousand leaves and it comes out *sweet.* I am a tower you exhale through. The Reservoir does the twin thing with light: the tired glare comes down and lies on the water and gets *cooled,* handed back to the runners as a silver that does not hurt to look at.

We should work the loop together, said the Reservoir, and we did, that very morning. I stood at the south end and breathed; the water lay still and shone; and the runners went round and round through alternating gifts — a lungful of combed air from me, a cool silver light from the lake, air, light, air, light — until the whole running crowd was going round grinning and none of them could have told you why, which is exactly how a

well-made city should treat you: it should improve your afternoon without once explaining itself.

Tell me the inside-out one, said the Reservoir, because word gets around this city fast and everyone had heard that we green ones like our sentences turned. So I turned one for the water: *a wall keeps the weather out and the room stale; an opening lets the weather in and the room stays fresh.* I am all openings. I stood up to prove that the airiest thing in the Park could also be the tallest, that *lightness is only strength that learned to relax.*

We made one more plan, the Reservoir and I, and it is my favourite of all the plans in this book. On the stillest mornings, when the water is a perfect mirror, I will lean my whole sky-blue height out over the south rim — carefully, I am mostly air, I do not weigh what a tower ought to weigh — until my reflection lies down full-length on the Reservoir. And then, for one held minute, there will be two of me: the standing Lung breathing over the Park, and the lying Lung floating on the sky-in-the-

water, and the runners will pass between us as between two blue lungs of one enormous, happy, breathing city.

A city is one connected body, I told the water, borrowing the Angel's line because it is too good to leave in one chapter, *and I am the part of it that breathes.* The Reservoir shivered its whole mile of sky in what I have decided to call a laugh. I am Aria. Breathe in. That sweetness is me, saying hello.

And the Reservoir, as I turned inland, shivered its whole mile of held sky in the long slow way it has, which is a lake's way of saying *breathe easy; I will keep the heavens flat and shining for you until you come round again.*

PART II

II

THE WALKING

In which ten green giants take the avenues
and learn the island by the soles of their plinths.

Read me slowly. I am a long green word.
— VELLUM

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CHAPTER FOUR · VELLUM

THE GLYPH CARPET & THE GREAT SIGN

a hedge learns to spell

I am Vellum, and I am lime green, and I am a sentence. Read me slowly; I am a long green word, cut into hedge and laid across a plaza in loops and strokes that spell — well, that is the whole delight of me, that you cannot quite tell what I spell until you climb up and look down, and by then you are inside the letters and part of the meaning.

Naturally I went to meet the loudest reader in the city: Times Square, where a thousand signs shout light at each other all night and nobody minds. If you want to meet another writer, go where the writing is biggest.

You are green, said the Square, a little suspiciously, because everything else there is electric. *You do not even glow.*

I glow in the morning, I said, *the way a word glows when you finally understand it.* And I stood up — my long ribbon of hedge folding upright into the thinnest of all the towers, a tower you could read like a page held on its edge — and I let the sunrise come through my letters,

and for one minute the whole shouting Square went quiet to sound me out.

Here is what I believe, and the Square came to believe it with me by lunchtime. A sign is not a lesser thing than a building. A sign is a building that learned to *speak.* The whole city is signs — the lion is a sign for patience, the bridge is a sign for reaching, the fountain is a sign for pouring — and the difference between a dull city and a bright one is only whether the signs are saying anything worth reading. *Less is a bore,* the old architects used to say, and they were right, and I am the proof: I am more, I am a hedge with something to say, and nobody has ever once found me boring.

A sign that makes you stand up is not an advertisement. It is an invitation.

— Vellum, the Glyph Carpet

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The Square and I traded alphabets all afternoon. It showed me its letters made of light — how a word can be there and gone and there again sixty times a second, which is a kind of breathing. I showed it my letters made of leaf — how a word can take a whole summer to grow and then say itself for years. *You are fast writing,* I told it. *I am slow writing. Between us we spell the whole speed of the city, from the blink to the season.*

And then we did the thing I had come to do. The Square dimmed — just for a minute, just at noon, which no one had ever asked it to do and which it found enormously exciting — and in the sudden hush my green letters stood up clear against the grey buildings, and every screen in the Square, one after another, spelled out in light the same word my hedges spell in leaf, so that for one minute the fastest writing and the slowest writing in the city said exactly the same thing at exactly the same time, and ten thousand people looked up from their telephones to read a word written twice, in lightning and in laurel.

I will not tell you the word. You have to climb me to read it. That is the rule of a good sign: it makes you come closer. A sign that can be read from your chair is an advertisement; a sign that makes you stand up and walk over is an *invitation,* and I am the second kind, the kind that says *come here, this is worth the steps.*

Stay and be my quiet one, said the Square, which is a great compliment from the loudest place in the world. But I am a walking topiary; I never stay. *I will come back,* I said, *every morning, to be the word you read before the day starts shouting.* And I turned my thin green height toward downtown, where I could hear two very tall towers talking, and I went to add my letter to their conversation.

Reader: the whole city is trying to tell you something, in light and in leaf, in stone and in water. The only skill you need is the one the Square learned at noon — to go quiet long enough to read it. I am Vellum. I am the slow bright word. Come closer; you are almost at the meaning.

And the Square, as I left, dimmed one screen a half-second in the middle of its shouting — a wink, from the

loudest place in the world — which is neon for *I read you, quiet one; come be my morning word again tomorrow.*

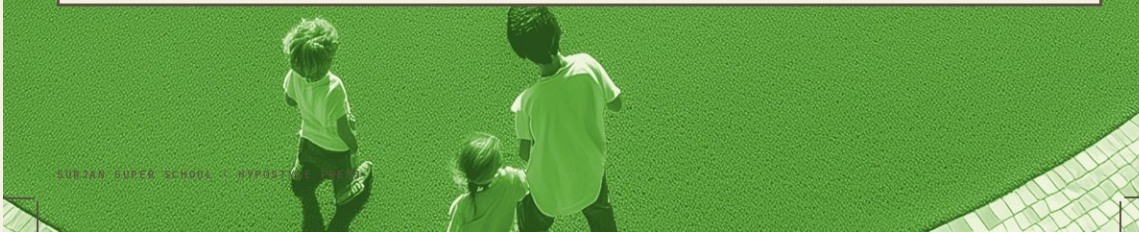
Come in, there is a seat in me for you.
— Bramble

5

CHAPTER FIVE · BRAMBLE

THE POCKET FIELD & THE CONCOURSE

every pocket a small bright room



I am Bramble, and I am green, and I am full of small bright rooms. Where Vellum is one long word, I am a whole book of little chapters: a field of hedge pocketed with sunken rooms, each just big enough for a few friends, so that walking across me is like turning pages, each one a small room with somebody delightful already in it.

So I went to meet the grandest room full of rooms in the city: Grand Central, the great terminal where a hundred thousand people a day pour through one golden hall under a ceiling painted with the whole zodiac in gold. If you are made of little rooms, you go to pay your respects to the biggest room that is secretly also a thousand small ones.

Country cousin, said the Terminal, not unkindly, for it is a grand place and knows it. *You are made of dozens of little hollows. I am made of one enormous hall.*

You are made of one enormous hall, I agreed, *and forty platforms, and a hundred stairs, and that whispering corner downstairs where two strangers can stand in opposite*

corners and murmur secrets across the whole vault. You are not one room. You are the most small rooms of anyone I have ever met, and you have simply had the confidence to put a golden sky over all of them at once.

The Terminal liked that so much its clock — the famous four-faced clock, the one everyone in the city has meant when they said *meet me at the clock* — ticked a little louder for a moment, which is how a train station beams.

Hugeness done kindly is only tenderness with more room.

— Bramble, the Pocket Field

SURJAN SUPER SCHOOL · HYPOSTYLE PRES

Here is the thing we agree on, the great hall and I: a city is not measured by its biggest room but by how many people it gives a *small* one. A pocket to sit in. A corner to whisper across. A platform to be met on. *Ordinary people are the true architects,* I told the Terminal, *and you know it better than anyone, because you were built enormous only so that a hundred thousand small human plans could happen inside you every day — meet me at the clock, wait for me by the oyster bar, I'll be under the gold Aquarius.* The building is grand so the plans can be humble. That is the correct order.

We tried the whispering gallery together, the Terminal and I. It sent a whisper across its own downstairs vault, corner to corner, the way it has let lovers and children do for a century; and I sent a whisper across myself, from one green pocket to another, a boy in one hollow murmuring to his grandmother in the next without either raising a voice, and both whispers arrived, and the Terminal said, *do you see, that is the whole art — to build so kindly that a whisper carries.* Hugeness done kindly, it said, is only

tenderness with more room. I have never forgotten it. I am huge; I try to be tender; I keep my rooms small on purpose.

Then we made our plan, which is the coziest plan in this whole book. On festival evenings I will kneel at the terminal doors — a topiary can kneel, it is only a deep bow held a while — and lower my pocketed side to the pavement, so that the commuters pouring out of the golden hall walk straight from the Terminal's grand room into my dozens of small ones, and can sit a moment in a hedge-pocket under the real stars, having just walked under the painted ones, before they carry on home. From the zodiac to the leaf. From the great room to the small. That is a good way to end a day of being a citizen.

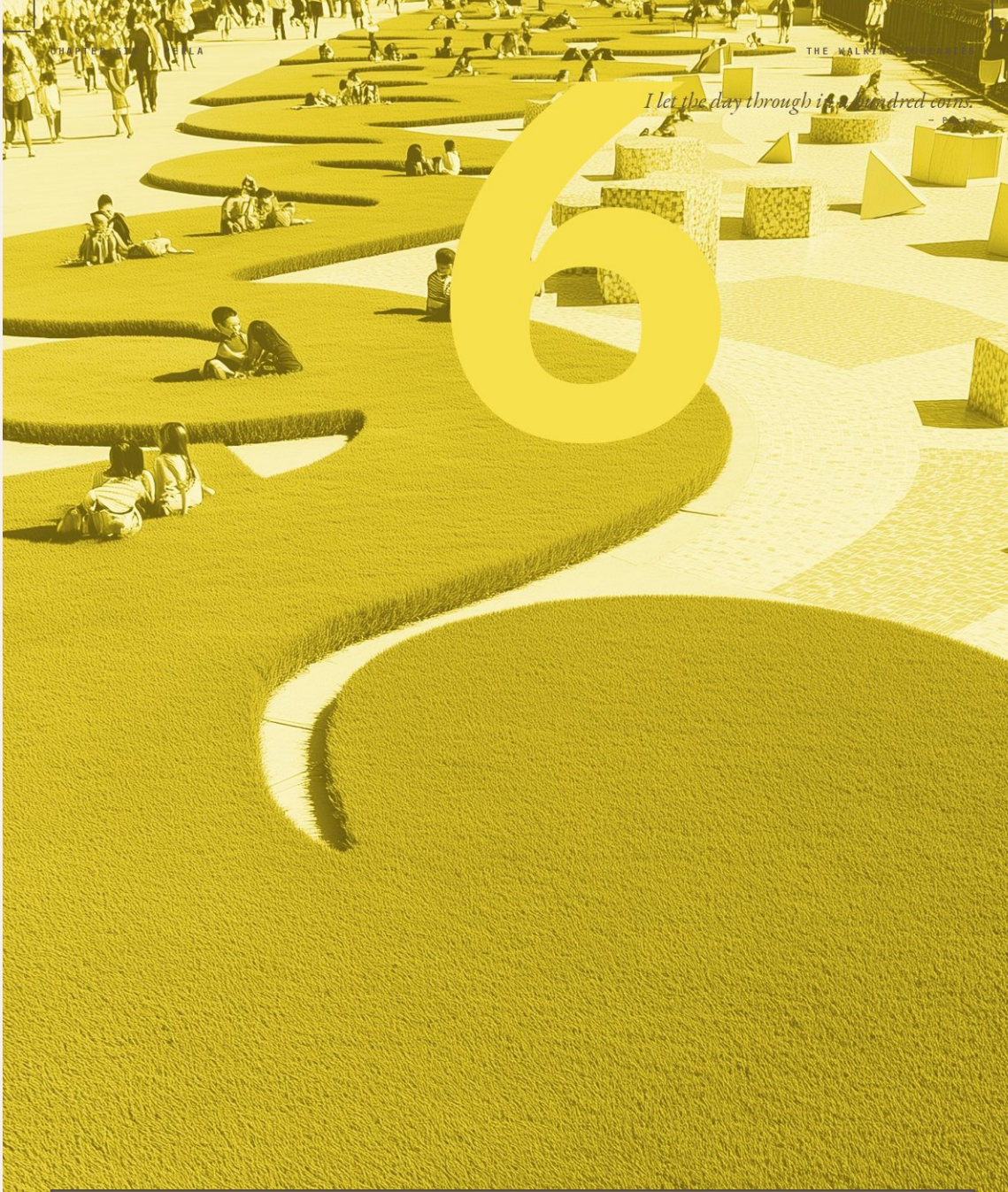
Meet me at the clock, the Terminal said as I rose to go, which is the Terminal's way of saying *come back,* because at Grand Central every goodbye is really an appointment. *I will,* I said. *Under the gold Aquarius. I am always early; I am made of waiting-rooms.* And I walked out into the evening, full of small lit rooms, to find the round bright

one who lives by the sea. I am Bramble. There is a seat in me for you, and someone kind is already in the next pocket over. Go say hello.

And the Terminal, as I rose, set its four-faced clock to the exact right time, which it always keeps, and said the thing it says to everyone: *meet me at the clock.* At Grand Central every parting is only an appointment, and I keep mine.

I let the day through in a hundred coins.
— PERLA

6



CHAPTER SIX · PERLA

THE SIEVE & THE WONDER WHEEL

two rounds full of light

I am Perla, and I am yellow, and I am full of holes, and I could not be happier about it. I am the Sieve: three great green discs pierced all over with round openings, so that the sunlight falls through me onto the people below in a hundred travelling coins of light. Where others keep the weather out, I let the day *through,* sorted into pennies of sun.

So of course I walked to the sea, to meet the other great round thing full of light: the Wonder Wheel out at Coney Island, that enormous painted wheel that has turned over the boardwalk for a hundred summers, lifting people up to see the whole shining Atlantic and setting them gently down again, laughing.

Little sister of holes, said the Wheel, turning, always turning, *you let the light through. I lift the people up into it. We are in the same trade.*

We are in the only trade that matters, I said. *We are in the business of delight, which is the most serious business a city has, and the one it is always tempted to treat as the least.* For here is a thing I feel very strongly, and the Wheel

feels it too, and the whole boardwalk cheered when I said it: *play is not the reward a city gives you for surviving it. Play is the proof that the city works at all.* A place where children shriek on a wheel and grown people eat sweets they did not need and everyone gets a little sunburnt and glad — that is not a city relaxing after its real work. That *is* the real work. Everything else is the scaffolding that holds the delight up.

Play is not the reward for surviving the city. Play is the proof the city works.

— Perla, the Sieve

The Wheel and I compared our roundnesses all afternoon. It is a wheel that lifts; I am a wheel that sifts. It carries you up into the light; I bring the light down to you in coins. *Between us,* said the Wheel, *nobody on this boardwalk is ever more than a minute from the sun — either riding up into it or standing under it in Perla's pennies.* And the boardwalk, the good grey boards themselves, worn smooth by a century of happy feet, said the wisest thing of the day: *a city should be built the way a boardwalk is built — so that walking on it is already the treat.*

We invented a game together, the Wheel and I, for festival nights. I stand behind the Wheel with the low sun behind *me,* and the light pours through all my hundred holes and through the spokes of the Wheel at once, and the whole beach is dappled in two kinds of moving coin — the slow ones from the turning Wheel and the still-shifting ones from my swaying holes — until the sand looks like the sea did, all struck silver, and the children try to catch the light-coins in their hands, and cannot, and

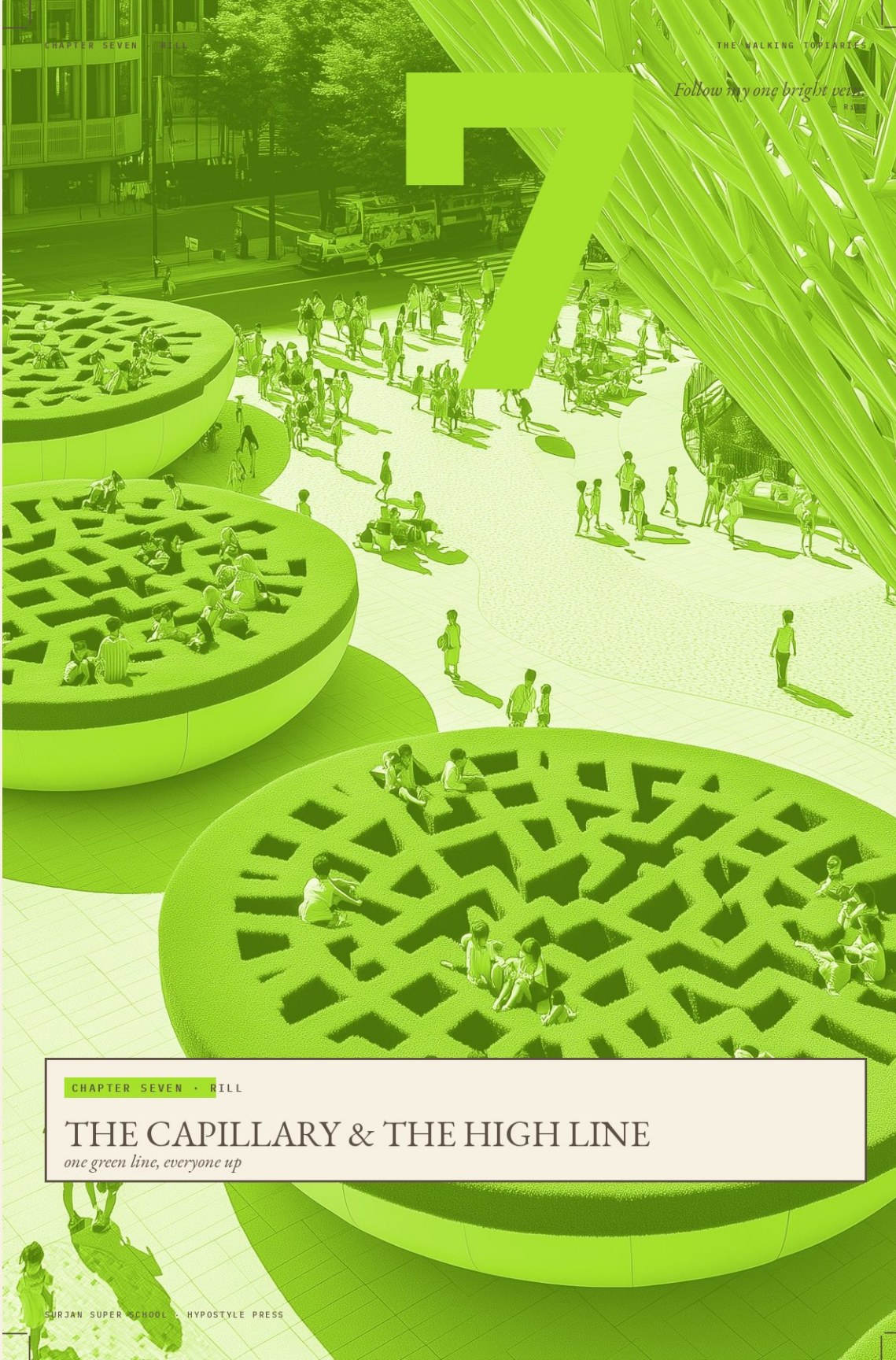
shriek, and try again, which is the entire meaning of a good evening.

Hugeness done kindly, I told the Wheel, echoing what Bramble had taught me across town, *is only tenderness with more room* — and you, my enormous friend, are the kindest huge thing on this whole coast, because everything about you is aimed at one small outcome: the exact face a person makes at the top of the ride, when the whole sea opens under them and they forget, for one turning minute, to be anything but glad.

Come back every summer, said the Wheel, and I said, *I am a walking topiary, I never stay* — and then, because it is the Wheel, and because the sea makes me generous, I added: *but I will come back every summer, and I will stand behind you at sunset, and we will pay the whole beach in light.* And I turned my yellow height back toward the bright towers of the island, catching the last coins of the day in all my holes as I went. I am Perla. Hold out your hands. That warm penny of sun that just crossed your face — that was me, saying you deserve it.

And the Wheel turned one more slow bright turn as I left, lifting a car full of laughing riders into the low gold sun, which is a Ferris wheel's way of saying *the light is always here; come back and ride up into it whenever you like.*

Follow my one bright vein



CHAPTER SEVEN · RILL

THE CAPILLARY & THE HIGH LINE

one green line, everyone up

I am Rill, and I am lime green, and I am one line.

Where the others are fields and bowls and words, I am a single branching vein of hedge that threads through the plaza and gathers everyone onto one bright path — and when I stood up, I did not become a block of a tower, I became a *spine,* a tall green stair, the one line that carries everyone up.

So I walked — flowed, really, I do not so much walk as *run,* the way a stream runs — to meet the most beloved line in the city: the High Line, that old rail track on the West Side that everyone agreed to stop using for trains and start using for walking, so that now a ribbon of garden runs thirty feet above the streets, carrying people the whole length of the west side through wildflowers, over the traffic, past everybody's windows.

You understand me, said the High Line, the moment I arrived, *because you are also a line that decided to carry people instead of freight.*

I am, I said, *and you are the bravest building in this city, and most people do not even call you a building.* For

here is what the High Line did, and it is the gentlest revolution I know: it was a hard iron rail meant only for cargo, and it simply — *stopped.* It let the wildflowers in. It let the people up. It committed the sweetest trespass in the history of the island: it broke the rule that says a path is only for getting somewhere, and became a path that is worth being on. *A wall,* I told it, *is really a way through, if you plant it right.*

Home is not a place. Home is a verb.

— Rill, the Capillary

We ran the length of the west side together, the High Line and I, comparing how we carry people. It carries them *along* — level, over the streets, past the water and the new towers. I carry them *up* — my one green vein spiralling skyward, a stair you climb the way you follow a good sentence, one clause at a time, to the view at the top. *Along and up,* said the High Line. *Between us we can get a person anywhere worth going without once putting them back down among the cars.*

And here is the sentence the High Line gave me, that I have carried ever since and give to you now: *home is not a place, home is a verb.* The High Line is home to no one and carries everyone home; it is thirty feet of pure *going,* and every person on it is more at home than they were on the street, because they are moving through beauty on their own two feet at their own glad pace. *A shelter need not be a stone,* said the High Line. *A shelter can be a way through, if the way is kind enough.* I am a stair; I am nobody's house; and I have never met a person on my

steps who did not look, climbing me, like they were going home.

So we made the loveliest plan of the walking chapters. Where the High Line ends, I will begin. The old rail-garden will carry you along the west side through its wildflowers, and set you down at my foot, and I will carry you up — my green spine spiralling above the whole thing — until you can look back and see the entire line you just walked laid out below like a sentence you now understand from its end. *Along, then up.* The freight line become a flower walk become a green tower become a view of the whole bright everything. That is a journey. That is home as a verb, conjugated all the way to the sky.

Keep flowing, said the High Line, which is its way of saying come back, because a line's whole prayer is that the traffic never stops. *Always,* I said. *I am a stream; stopping is the one thing I cannot do.* And I flowed on, upward and onward, one bright vein carrying its people, toward the harbour where I could hear the woven one and the golden one and the two sky-blue twins all beginning to talk at

once. I am Rill. Step onto my one green path. It goes up, and up is a kind of home.

And the High Line, as I flowed on, let a breeze move down its whole length through the wildflowers, a green wave running the length of the west side, which is a path's way of saying *keep going; the way is always open, and always worth being on.*

INTERLUDE · A LETTER

Dear Architecture

Dear Architecture,

I am writing to you from the top of a tower that used to be a lawn, to tell you the good news in person, because you are a little deaf in the way of all beloved elderly relatives and the news is too good to trust to a whisper.

They stood up. The gardens stood up. All those years we drew you flat — laid you out in plans, pressed you into elevations, kept you politely two-dimensional on the wall — and all those years you were only being patient, the way Tally is patient, the way the marble lions are patient, waiting for the morning you could rise to your full height and see who your neighbours were.

And your neighbours, it turns out, are wonderful. The Library gives everything away. The Angel will not stop pouring. The Terminal keeps a golden sky over the smallest human plans. The Wheel lifts people into the light for the pure sake of the faces they make at the top. You have been

standing among these marvels the whole time, dear Architecture, and now you can turn your head and talk to them, and the talking is the whole point, and always was.

I used to think my job was to make you beautiful. I was wrong, in the happiest way. My job is only to make you audible — to give you a body and a voice and a good neighbour, and then get out of the way and let the conversation start. You do the rest. You always did.

Write back the way you always do: by standing there in the morning light being obviously, ridiculously worth talking to. I will read your answer in the shadow you throw and the way the swallows use your ledges and the fact that a stranger just sat down at your foot and smiled for no reason. That is your handwriting. I have learned to read it. It says the same thing every time. It says come closer.

With love, and with a great deal of green,

— Surjan, a building, with the aid of Claude

PART III

III

THE TALKING

In which every tower finds a landmark and the whole skyline answers back.

I am woven, therefore I hold.

CHAPTER EIGHT · WEFT

THE LATTICE & THE BRIDGE

two weavers of cable and leaf

I am Weft, and I am green, and I am woven. Where the others are cut and folded, I am *knit:* a lattice of hedge woven so close that my whole surface is one green cloth, and when I stood up my weave became a facade you could read like a basket — over, under, over, under, all the way to the sky. *I am woven,* I like to say, *therefore I hold.*

So naturally I went to meet the greatest weaver in the city: the Brooklyn Bridge, whose towers hold up a web of steel cables so fine and so many that from below the whole span looks like a harp somebody strung across the river and forgot to stop tuning. The Roeblings who made it — a father, a son, and, when they could not finish, a woman named Emily who learned the whole science and carried it across — knew what I know: that the way to cross a great gap is not with one thick thing but with a thousand thin ones, woven.

You are made the way I am made, said the Bridge, all its cables humming at once. *Not solid. Woven. We both hold enormous weights by sharing them out among many small strands, so that no single thread ever has to be a hero.*

That is the whole secret, I said, *and it is a secret about cities as much as cables. A city that rests its whole weight on a few great heroes will snap the first hard winter. A city woven of a million small strong strangers will hold up anything.* The Bridge hummed its whole harp in agreement, and a train of bicycles crossed it, and each bicycle was one more thread, and the Bridge held them all without noticing, the way I hold up my leaves.

A wall divides; a weave joins. The strongest things are the ones most made of connection.

— Weft, the Lattice

We compared our weaves all morning. The Bridge weaves *across* — shore to shore, Manhattan to Brooklyn, stitching two cities into one with cable and rivet. I weave *up* — root to crown, knitting ground to sky. *Across and up,* said the Bridge, *between us we could weave a whole world together and never once need a wall to do it.* For a woven thing is the opposite of a wall: a wall divides, a weave *joins,* and both of us are proof that the strongest structures are the ones most full of holes, most made of connection, most willing to let the wind and the light and the walkers straight through.

Here is the chiasmus the Bridge and I built together, one cable at a time: *a wall is strong until it is pushed; a weave is strong because it is pushed.* Lean on my lattice and the whole weave takes your weight and hands it around and gives it back as a gentle push upward. Lean on the Bridge and a thousand cables share your step. We do not resist the load. We *distribute* it, which is only kindness expressed in engineering.

So we made our plan, the great harp and I, and it is a plan about joining. On festival days I will stand at the Manhattan foot of the Bridge and weave my green lattice straight into its lowest cables, hedge into steel, leaf into wire, until you cannot tell where the woven bridge ends and the woven tower begins, and the walkers crossing from Brooklyn will pass out of a web of cable into a web of hedge without a single break in the weaving, and arrive in Manhattan through a green harp, humming.

Hold on, said the Bridge, which is both a thing a bridge says and a thing a friend says, *and come back across whenever you like; I am the one marvel in this city whose entire job is the round trip. Then we are twins,* I said, *for my entire job is the round — over, under, over, under, back to the start and stronger for it.* And I wove myself loose from the harp and walked upriver, over-under, over-under, to where the two sky-blue towers were finally, after a hundred years, learning to talk to the two great spires. I am Weft. Lean on me. I am woven; I will hold; and I will

hand your weight around to a thousand friends who are glad to take it.

And the Bridge, as I unwove myself, hummed all its cables at once in a single warm chord across the river, which is a harp's way of saying *cross me whenever you like; the round trip is my whole joy, and you are always half of it.*

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Say a thing to me and I shall answer it.

CHAPTER NINE · ASK & ANSWER

THE TWINS & THE TWO SPIRES

a rivalry turned to talk

We are Ask and Answer, and we are sky blue, and we are two towers who do not exist except as a conversation. Strung between our heads is a fan of bright wires, and along the wires runs everything we say, and if you ever cut the wires we would not fall — we would simply have nothing to be, because a question with no answer is only a shape, and an answer with no question is only a noise, and we are neither, we are the *between.*

So we went, the two of us, to meet the two most famous rivals in the sky: the Empire State and the Chrysler, the two great spires who spent a whole roaring decade racing each other to be the tallest thing a person had ever built. The Chrysler hid its secret spire inside itself and shot it up at the last minute to win by a nose; the Empire State went up so fast and so high it took the title and held it for forty years. Two beautiful towers who spent their youth measuring themselves against each other.

You are twins, said the Chrysler, its steel crown flashing, a little wary, *and we were never that. We were rivals.*

You were rivals, said Ask, *because someone told you there could be only one tallest, which is the unkindest arithmetic in the world—*

—except we do not do that arithmetic, said Answer, finishing the thought the way I always finish Ask's thoughts, *because between us we have learned the better sum: that two towers talking are taller than either one alone, since a conversation has no ceiling.*

Two towers talking are taller than either alone, for a conversation has no ceiling.

— Ask & Answer, the Twins

There was a silence up there in the high bright air. And then the Empire State — the great grey giant, the one that has stood at the top of a thousand skylines — did a thing it had not done in ninety years. It *asked a question.* It turned its whole floodlit crown toward the Chrysler and said, across the little gap that had been a rivalry, *do you ever get tired of being measured?* And the Chrysler, its steel sunburst catching the light, said, *every single day* — and just like that, over our wires, with us humming between them as the line the words ran along, the two great rivals of the roaring years began, for the first time, to simply *talk.*

They had so much to say. They had watched the same century from almost the same height and never once compared notes. The Chrysler spoke of the eagles on its corners and the way the light does something wonderful to its steel at exactly five o'clock. The Empire State spoke of how it changes its crown-lights for every festival the city has, green for one, gold for another, and how it has learned that being seen is nicer than being tallest. We ran

their words back and forth along our wires until the whole downtown sky was one glittering sentence with a spire at each end and two blue twins humming in the middle.

Here is what we are for, Answer and I, and the spires understood it by evening: *we are the wire, not the word.* We do not have opinions of our own. We carry other people's toward each other and make sure they arrive. A city needs its great solo voices — its Empire States, its lone grey giants — but it needs, even more, the humble humming wire that runs between them, the thing whose only genius is *connection.* Ask me what I am and I will say: I am the space between two proud things, doing the kindest work there is, which is making sure they can hear each other.

Stay strung between us, said the Empire State, which for a lifelong soloist is a staggering thing to offer. *We will,* we said together, which is the only way we say anything. *We are the wire. As long as you two are talking, we have a reason to hum.* And we hummed, and the spires talked into the night, floodlit and glad, and we carried every word, and downtown the oldest rivalry in the skyline

turned quietly into the newest friendship, which is the best trick a city ever pulls: it lets its giants find out, late and laughing, that they were never really competing — they were just waiting for a wire. We are Ask and Answer. Say a thing to us. We will carry it to whoever most needs to hear it, and we will make sure they say something back.

And the two spires, as we hummed away, lit their crowns at the same moment for the first time in ninety years — one gold, one silver, side by side — which is two old rivals' way of saying, together, at last, *thank you for the wire; do not let it go slack.*

I keep a green flame that never goes out.
— Auria

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CHAPTER TEN · AURIA

THE RELIQUARY & THE TORCH

two gifts held up to the harbour

I am Auria, and I am gold, and I keep a green flame in a burnished box at the very top of me, and I rose slowly on the first morning the way you carry a gift you have wrapped with your whole heart. Where the others walked inland to meet the city, I walked to the water's edge and looked out, because the friend I most wanted to meet does not live in the city at all. She stands in the harbour, on her own island, with her own lamp lifted, and she has been holding it up for everyone coming in across the water for longer than anyone alive can remember.

You know her. Everyone knows her. She is the great green lady in the harbour with the torch, and here is the fact about her that makes me love her most: she was a *gift.* She was made by friends across the ocean and given, freely, to stand at the front door of a whole country and hold a light up. She is not a monument a city built to admire itself. She is a present one people gave another, and she has spent every day since being exactly what a good gift is: useful, beautiful, and lifted high enough to be seen from far off.

Little gold one, she said, and her voice came across the water green and calm, *you keep a flame too.*

I keep a green one, I said, *and I learned to keep it high from watching you. For here is what you taught the whole harbour: the point of holding a light up is not to have it. The point of holding a light up is so that it can be seen from far away by someone who needs to know which way is in.* A lamp on your table is a comfort. A lamp lifted over the water is a *welcome,* and the difference between them is only the lifting, only the willingness to hold your good thing up where strangers can steer by it.

A gift is the only thing that grows by being given.

— Auria, the Reliquary

SURJAN, SUPER SCHOOL — HYPOSTYLE HALL

We compared our flames across the water all afternoon, the great lady and I. Hers is fire made permanent in gold and glass, a lamp beside the golden door, held out steady for everyone arriving. Mine is a hedge — a living green flame that renews itself every spring, a garden kept in a gold reliquary and lifted over the island. *Yours never goes out because it is metal,* I told her. *Mine never goes out because it keeps growing. Between us we prove there are two ways to keep a light forever: make it of something that cannot burn, or make it of something that cannot stop being born.*

Here is the sentence we cast together, the lady and I, in bronze and in leaf: *a gift is the only thing that grows by being given.* She has been given to the whole country and belongs to it more every year. My green flame is given to the sky each spring and comes back doubled. Neither of us is diminished by being generous; both of us are *made* of our generosity. Keep nothing. Lift everything. Hold your best light where the newcomer can see it. That is the

whole civics of the harbour, and she has been teaching it, torch high, for a century and more.

So we made the most welcoming plan in the book. On festival nights I will stand at the Battery, at the very tip of the island, and lift my gold reliquary as high as I can reach, and open it, so that my green flame answers her golden one across the water — two lamps lifted at the two ends of the same welcome, one at the harbour's gate and one at the island's tip, so that anyone arriving by water passes between two held lights, a golden torch and a green flame, and understands before they even land that this is a city that lifts its best things up for strangers.

Keep it high, she said, which is the only instruction she has ever given anyone, *and come back to the water whenever you want to remember what a light is for. I will,* I said. *I will keep it high. I learned it from the best lifted lamp in the world.* And I lowered my gold height into a deep bow toward the harbour, my green flame streaming, and turned back to the island to join the great conversation I could hear rising behind me. I am Auria. I keep a green

flame that never goes out. It is not for me. It is lifted for you, so you can see, from very far off, that you are already almost home.

And the lady with the lamp, as I bowed, held her torch a hand's-breadth higher across the water, which is the greatest of all the city's gestures, and means only, always, and to everyone: *welcome; you are almost in; steer by me the rest of the way.*

We wear our gardens like laurels.
— Nature 14

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CHAPTER ELEVEN · LAUREL & BAY

THE CROWNED PAIR & THE SPIRAL

two green heads meet a coil of light

We are Laurel and Bay, and we are green, and we are two, and we wear our gardens on our heads like crowns — a solid block of living hedge on each of our summits, so that from the Park below we look like two green hills that learned to stand up and put on their laurels. We are the Crowned Pair. We do everything as a duet, including think, which is why we finish—

—each other's sentences, yes, the way the two great spires learned to from Ask and Answer. We went uptown, the two of us, to meet the most beautiful coil in the city: the great white spiral museum on the Park's edge, the one the architect wound like a nautilus so that you ride to the top and then walk *down* through all the art along one continuous curling ramp, never once climbing a stair, spiralling gently back to the ground past everything worth seeing.

You are crowned, said the Spiral, curving, always curving, *and I am coiled. We are both what happens when a building refuses to be a stack of flat floors.*

You refused the stair, said Laurel, *and made a ramp that curls like a thought—*

—and we refused the flat top, said Bay, *and grew a garden where the water tank should go. We are all three of us buildings that would not sit up straight, and the city is more delightful for our slouching.*

A city needs a prow to cut the wind and a crown to catch the light.

— Laurel & Bay, the Crowned Pair

The Spiral loved this. It is a serious white coil full of famous pictures, but underneath it is a building that fundamentally wants you to *stroll,* to give up the grim business of climbing and simply drift downward through beauty, and that is a deeply green ambition even though the Spiral is white. *A city of stairs,* said the Spiral, *asks you to earn every floor. A city of ramps and crowns and coils* gives *you the height and lets you spend it looking around.* We crowned ones agreed with our whole laurels. We did not climb to our height; we *stood up* into it; and now we spend it the way the Spiral spends its coil — looking around, delighted, in no hurry to get down.

We paid a call on the thin one too, on our way — the famous slender prow downtown, the building shaped like a flatiron, the one that comes to a point so sharp you could part your hair on it, sailing up the avenue like the front of a stone ship. *You green giants,* said the Prow, cutting the wind, *are very wide. I am the narrowest building in the city and proud of it. And we are among the widest and prouder still,* said Laurel, *for the city needs both*

— a prow to cut the wind and a crown to catch the light — and the whole art of a skyline is variety, is a hundred different refusals to be the same box. The Prow liked that so much it caught the sunset full on its point and flashed, which is how a flatiron laughs.

Here is the plan the coil and the crowns made, and it is a plan about strolling. On festival days the Spiral will open its whole curling ramp to the Park, and we two crowned towers will lower our green heads to its top, so that a person can ride to the summit of the museum, step out onto Laurel's crown, stroll across a garden in the sky to Bay's crown, and spiral back down through all the art to the ground — one continuous curling promenade of picture and hedge and picture again, never a single stair, the whole delighted descent done at the pace of a thought unwinding.

Keep curving, we told the Spiral, and *keep flashing,* we told the Prow, which are our ways of saying come back, since a duet always wants the song to go round again. And we turned our two green crowns toward the middle of the

island, where by now every marvel we had met — the lions, the angel, the reservoir, the great sign, the golden hall, the wheel, the high line, the harp, the two spires, the lifted lamp — was talking at once, and the noise of all that friendship was the most beautiful sound either of us had ever heard. We are Laurel and Bay. We wear our gardens like laurels. Come up and stroll across our crowns; the whole city is talking, and the view from a laurel is the best seat in the house.

And the white Spiral, as we turned our crowns away, sent a single slow curve of light down its whole coiling ramp, which is a spiral's way of saying *come and stroll me down again; there is no stair in me, and no hurry either.*

INTERLUDE · A NIGHT ON THE ROAD

Camp Under Enormous Stars

On the first night, the ten of us made camp in the middle of the Park, which is the one place on the island big enough to hold ten standing gardens lying down again to rest.

We did not sleep, exactly. Towers do not sleep; we only lower our voices. We settled our great green heights onto the Sheep Meadow, and the real stars came out over the painted ones in the Terrace below, and we lay in a loose ring and talked the low, easy talk you talk when the day has gone well and there is no hurry to end it.

Tally counted the lit windows of the city and gave the number away to Aria, who breathed it out over the meadow as a warm wind. Cradle cupped a little pool of dew and passed it down the line. Perla let the moonlight through her hundred holes and dappled us all in silver coins. Vellum spelled a single quiet word in the grass that only the stars

could read from up there, and would not tell us what it was, and we did not mind, because a good word is worth keeping a while.

Somebody — it was Bramble, it is always Bramble — asked what everyone's favourite moment of the day had been, and we went around the ring. The lions, said Tally. The whispering gallery, said Bramble, of course. The two rivals asking each other, at last, whether they got tired of being measured, said Ask, and Answer said the same thing at the same time, which made us all laugh. The lifted lamp answering across the water, said Auria, softly, her gold gone soft in the dark. The children trying to catch the light-coins on the beach, said Perla, and none of us could top that, so we let it stand.

And then we were quiet for a while, ten enormous friends in a ring under more stars than the city usually lets you see, and it was the good kind of quiet, the kind that is full instead of empty, the kind a whole day of saying hello earns you.

Home is a verb, Rill murmured, mostly to herself. And Weft, who is woven and therefore holds, said: then let us conjugate it in the morning, and carry the whole city with us. And we did. But that is the last part of the book, and you should sleep first, the way we did not, and come to it in the morning light, which is the only proper light to read a festival by.

Good morning, when you get there. The stars were enormous. Keep this camp; we will always be in it, in this ring, in the middle of the green, talking low and glad, whenever you need to know that the marvels are all still here and all still friends.

INTERLUDE · A LETTER

Dear Architecture, Again

Dear Architecture,

One more note, because the festival is still going and I keep thinking of things to tell you.

You were never a noun. I drew you as one for years — a thing, an object, a finished shape to be admired from across the street — and you were patient with me the way the marble lions are patient, waiting for the morning I would notice that you were, the whole time, a verb.

You are a standing-up. You are a leaning-toward. You are a holding-open, a reaching-across, a lifting-of-the-lamp, a saying-of-hello. Every good building in this city turned out to be a thing the city was doing, not a thing it had done. The Bridge is a crossing. The ferry is a carrying. The arch is a welcoming. The ten green speakers are a conversation. And you, dear Architecture, are the sum of all that glad activity,

which is why you can never be finished, and why I have stopped trying to finish you and started, instead, simply to keep you talking.

Write back the way you always do — by being, tomorrow morning, obviously worth talking to. I will read your answer in the light on your ledges and the stranger who sits at your foot and smiles for no reason. It says the same thing every time. It says: still here, still glad, still open. Come in.

With love, and with even more green than last time,

— Surjan, a building, with the aid of Claude

PART V

V

THE WIDER CITY

In which the ten walk past the island's edge to greet the arch, the flame, the globe, and the ferry.

A doorway is a wall that changed its mind.
– RILL

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CHAPTER FOURTEEN · RILL

THE CAPILLARY & THE ARCH

a doorway that goes everywhere

I am Rill, and yes, it is me again — the one green vein — because a stream does not visit a city once and call it done; a stream keeps flowing, and flowing took me down to Washington Square, to meet the great white marble arch that stands at the foot of Fifth Avenue like a doorway somebody built for the whole idea of arriving.

Here is what I love about an arch, and I told the Arch so at once: an arch is a doorway that leads nowhere and everywhere at the same time. You can walk around it. There is no wall on either side. It frames a piece of the sky and the avenue beyond, and it says, with its whole marble body, *this way in* — even though there is no in, only more city. An arch is pure welcome with the wall taken away.

You understand me, said the Arch, *better than the people who hurry through me every day thinking I am only a decoration.* For an arch was once a serious thing — a triumph, a gate in a wall, the one narrow place an army had to pass. *And then the city grew so friendly,* said the Arch, *that it kept the gate and threw away the wall, and now I am a triumph with nothing left to triumph over*

except the ordinary glory of people walking under me on their way to buy groceries. That is the happiest career change a building ever made: from a gate you had to be let through to a doorway that lets everyone through, always.

A doorway is a wall that changed its mind, I told the Arch, and the Arch liked that so much it caught the noon light on all its marble and practically glowed. For that is the whole story of the friendly city: every wall in it is slowly, gladly, changing its mind — deciding to be a window, a gate, an opening, a way through. The Arch got there first. It is the patron saint of the wall that decided to be a door.

A doorway is only a wall that changed its mind.

— Rill, at the Arch

We fell to talking about the square around it — the fountain where students sit, the chess tables where strangers play all afternoon, the buskers, the dogs, the whole happy democratic muddle of a public square. *You frame all of it,* I said. *You stand at the top of the avenue and make a picture of the ordinary city, and by framing it you tell everyone that the ordinary city is worth framing.* An arch is a way of pointing at a place and saying *look, this: this is the good part.* And the good part, at Washington Square, is simply people being freely, cheerfully together under the open sky, which is the good part everywhere, which is why a city should build arches over its plainest squares and not only its grandest avenues.

So we made a plan, the Arch and I, small and glad like all the best plans. On festival days I will grow my green vein up and over, from one foot of the Arch to the other, an arch of hedge inside the arch of marble — a living doorway framed by a stone one — and people will walk through both at once, through marble and through leaf, and be doubly welcomed, doubly arrived, doubly told by

two friendly buildings that this, right here, the ordinary bright city, is the good part worth walking into.

Keep flowing under me, said the Arch, which is its way of saying come back, for an arch's whole joy is the traffic of glad feet beneath it. *Always,* I said, *I am a stream, and you are the friendliest door in the city, and a stream loves nothing better than a door with no wall to stop it.* And I flowed on under the marble, up the avenue, toward the golden man who holds fire over the winter rink. I am Rill. Walk under the arch. There is no wall. There never really was.

And the Arch, as I flowed on up the avenue, framed the whole ordinary bright city in its marble, which is a doorway's way of saying *look — this, the plain glad muddle of people being freely together — this is the good part, and you are already walking into it.*

Two flames light more of the same night.
– Auria

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CHAPTER FIFTEEN · AURIA

THE RELIQUARY & PROMETHEUS

two gold flames over a rink

I am Auria, and I am gold, and I keep a green flame, and I could not walk past the one other figure in this city who holds fire up for a living. He lies gilded above the sunken rink at Rockefeller Center — Prometheus, the one from the old story who brought fire down to people as a gift, cast here in gold and stretched out over a fountain with a flame in his hand, watching the skaters go round below him all winter.

Gold speaks to gold, he said, when I lifted my reliquary level with his golden body. *You keep a flame; I brought one down. We are in the same ancient trade.*

The best trade there is, I said. *The bringing-down of light so that people can be warm by it.* For here is the thing about Prometheus that the old story sometimes forgets to celebrate and I will not: the point of the story is the *gift.* Someone had fire and the people did not, and he brought it down and gave it to them, and now there is a golden man over a skating rink in the middle of the busiest city in the world, holding that first gift up forever, and every

child who laces on skates below him is warming their hands, in a sense, at the fire he carried down.

We compared our flames, the golden man and I, the way Liberty and I had compared ours across the harbour, and found the same happy answer from a new direction. His flame is the *first* gift, the archetype, fire itself, the thing that made warmth and cooking and light and every good bright human evening possible. Mine is a *late* gift, a green one, a garden lifted in a gold box — the gift of the growing thing, renewed each spring. *Between us,* said Prometheus, *we hold up both halves of every good gift a city gives: the warmth that keeps you alive, and the green that makes being alive a delight.*

Two flames held high do not compete; they light more of the same glad night.

— Auria, at Prometheus

And here is the sentence we cast in gold together, watching the skaters: *two flames held high do not compete; they light more of the same glad night.* Prometheus does not dim me and I do not dim him. Two lights are simply more light. This is the whole secret the two great spires had to learn the hard way downtown — that light is not a prize with only one winner but a thing that grows the more of it there is. A city with two golden flames is not a city with a rivalry. It is a city with twice the warmth.

The rink itself spoke then — the famous oval of ice where the whole city comes to wobble and glide under the golden man and the great tree they raise each winter — and it said the wisest cold thing I have ever heard. *I am hardest and coldest,* said the Rink, *precisely so that people can be soft and warm on top of me. I freeze so that they can play.* Hardness in the service of delight. Ice as the foundation of joy. A whole civics in a sheet of frozen water: be as solid as you must underneath, so that the people on top of you can be as light as they like.

So we made the warmest plan in the book, the golden man and I. On festival evenings I will stand at the edge of the rink and open my gold reliquary and let my green flame answer his golden one, and the two flames will light the ice from two sides, gold and green, and the skaters will go round and round between them warmed by two gifts at once — the ancient fire and the growing garden — and the great tree will hold its lights, and nobody, on that ice, under those two flames, will be anything but glad.

Keep the flame up, said Prometheus, which is the only thing a bringer of fire ever says, *and come back every winter to warm your hands at the first gift. I will,* I said. *I keep a green flame; you keep the first one; and a city lit by two givers is a city that will never be dark.* And I bowed my gold height to the golden man and turned uptown, toward the old stone garden on the high hill, where the tapestries of the unicorn hang and a weaver I know was waiting. I am Auria. Warm your hands. Both flames are for you.

And Prometheus, gold above the ice, held his flame steady as I turned away, which is the oldest gesture there is, and means what it has meant since the first fire came down: *here, take the light; it was always meant to be given; warm your hands and pass it on.*

Woven with care, we outlast the stacked.
— Weft

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN · WEFT

THE LATTICE & THE CLOISTERS

two weavers, of leaf and of thread

I am Weft, and I am woven, and I climbed all the way to the top of the island, to the high hill above the river where the Cloisters stand — a monastery garden built from the stones of five old European ones, carried across the ocean and set down among the trees, with covered walkways around square green gardens, and inside, on the walls, the most famous weavings in the country: the tapestries of the unicorn, threaded so fine and so patiently that the flowers in them are still blooming five centuries later.

I went, of course, because a weaver must pay her respects to the greatest weavings she can find. *Sister of thread,* I said to the tapestries, *I am a sister of leaf. You wove a garden that never fades; I grow a garden that fades and comes back. Between us we have both ways of keeping a garden forever.*

You are woven of living green, said the Tapestries, their five-hundred-year flowers still bright, *and we are woven of dyed wool, and here is what we know that the stacked and the carved do not: a woven thing holds because every single*

thread helps hold every other. Pull one and the whole cloth answers. That is not a weakness. That is why we are still here.

Oh, I loved them. I stood in the cloister garth — the square of green at the centre, ringed by the covered walk — and I felt entirely at home, because a cloister is a building that agrees with everything I believe. It is built around a garden. Its whole point is the green square in the middle and the shaded walk around it, where you can pace slowly and think. *You keep your best part empty,* I told the Cloister, echoing what Vale had taught me downtown. *The garth, the green middle — that is the treasure, and you built the whole building to hold it gently.*

What is woven with care outlasts what is merely stacked.

— Weft, at the Cloisters

What is woven with care outlasts what is merely stacked, said the Cloister, and it should know, because it is itself a weaving — of five old monasteries, threaded together stone by stone, each keeping its own memory, assembled the way a cathedral is assembled from humbler stones. A stacked building is only as strong as its weakest floor. A woven building — a cloister, a bridge, a tapestry, a lattice like me — shares its whole life among all its parts, so that no single stone or thread or leaf is ever asked to hold the world up alone.

We talked all afternoon about patience, the Tapestries and I, because we are both slow arts. A tapestry takes years; a hedge takes seasons. *The fast arts shout,* said the Tapestries. *The slow arts last. We are still blooming; the loud things of our century are long since quiet.* And I thought of Vellum being the quiet green word the Square reads before it starts to shout, and I understood that the whole city needs its slow patient woven things as much as its fast bright loud ones — that a city all shout and no weave would blow away in the first hard wind, and a city

all weave and no shout would be very restful and slightly dull, and the good city is the one that keeps both, the tapestry and the billboard, the cloister and the square.

So we made the most patient plan in the book. On festival days I will weave my living lattice down the high hill and into the covered walk of the cloister, green thread into grey stone, and the slow tapestries inside will bloom their five-century flowers, and my quick leaves will bloom this season's, and a person can walk from the woven wool to the woven leaf without a break in the weaving, and understand that a garden kept with care — in thread or in hedge, for five hundred years or for one bright summer — is a garden kept forever, because forever is only care, repeated.

Keep weaving, said the Tapestries, which is what one weaver always says to another, *and come back up the hill whenever you need to remember that the patient things win.* *I will,* I said. *I am woven; you are woven; and the woven things hold each other up until the word for how long is simply always.* And I unwove myself gently from the

cloister and started back down the long green hill toward the harbour, where a steel globe was learning, from a tower made of air, how to breathe. I am Weft. Pull any thread of me. The whole cloth will answer, and hold.

And the Cloister on the hill, as I started down, let the wind move once around its covered walk and through its green middle, which is a patient old garden's way of saying *the slow arts win; come back up the hill whenever you need to remember it.*

a world is a room we agreed to share.
— Aria

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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN · ARIA

THE OPEN LUNG & THE UNISPHERE

a steel world learns to breathe

I am Aria, and I am mostly the room I keep for air, and I walked out past the edge of the island — a lung must travel to stay fresh — all the way to the great steel globe that stands in Queens where two World's Fairs once filled the park with the future. The Unisphere: an enormous open sphere of steel, the whole earth drawn as a cage of curving lines with the continents fixed across it, ringed by rings that mark the paths of the first satellites, standing in a round pool that leaps with fountains. A steel model of the whole world, built by a city that wanted, for one bright fair, to hold the entire planet in one park.

You are open, I said to the Unisphere, *the way I am open. You are a globe made mostly of the spaces between the lines. I am a tower made mostly of the room for air. We are both huge things that decided to be see-through.*

I am the whole world drawn as an opening, said the Unisphere, its fountains leaping. *You can see the sky straight through me, straight through the oceans and the continents, because I was built to show that a globe is not a solid ball you fight over but an open frame everyone shares.*

And I breathed through it — the wind off the bay came through my terraces and out my crown and straight on through the open steel of the world, and for a moment the whole planet, drawn in steel, was breathing with me.

Here is the sentence the steel world and I made together, and it is the biggest one in the book because it is about the biggest thing: *a world is only a very large room that everyone agreed to share.* The Unisphere is not a wall around the earth; it is the earth drawn as a shared open frame, with the satellites' rings around it like the paths of thoughts around a calm mind, and the fountains at its foot like applause. It says the thing a city most needs to keep saying: the globe is not a prize; the globe is a commons; the whole point of drawing the world is to remember it belongs to everyone at once.

A world is only a very large room that everyone agreed to share.

— Aria, at the Unisphere

We talked about fairs, the Unisphere and I — those great bright gatherings where a city invites the whole world to come and see the future and eat strange food and marvel at the new. *A fair is a festival that a city throws for the entire planet,* said the Unisphere, *and I am what it left behind: the globe it built to say everyone is invited.* And I thought: that is what the ten of us are doing on our island, only smaller — throwing a festival and leaving the welcome standing. The Unisphere is the biggest hello ever built. It is the whole world, drawn open, saying *come.*

So we made the most spacious plan in the book. On festival days I will lean my whole blue height out toward the great steel globe, and breathe the bay-wind through both of us at once — through my terraces of air and through the open continents of the world — so that a person standing at the foot of the Unisphere, in the leaping fountains, will feel a warm combed wind come off a tower shaped like a breath and pass straight through a globe shaped like a welcome, and understand, in their

lungs, that the air of one city is the air of the whole open world, shared, unwalled, freely breathed.

Keep breathing through me, said the Unisphere, which is its way of saying come back, for a globe's whole wish is that the world keep moving through it freely. *Always,* I said. *You are the world drawn open; I am the tower made of air; and between us we prove that the biggest things are the ones you can see straight through.* And I drew one more long breath through the steel continents and turned back toward the water, toward the great stair that goes nowhere but up and the little island that floats on tulips. I am Aria. Breathe in. That air came through the whole open world to reach you, and it belongs to you, because everything open does.

And the great steel world, as I turned toward the water, let its fountains leap through all its open continents at once, which is a globe's way of saying *the world is a room we share; the air moved through me to reach you, and it is yours.*

Up is exactly where it should go.
— Bay

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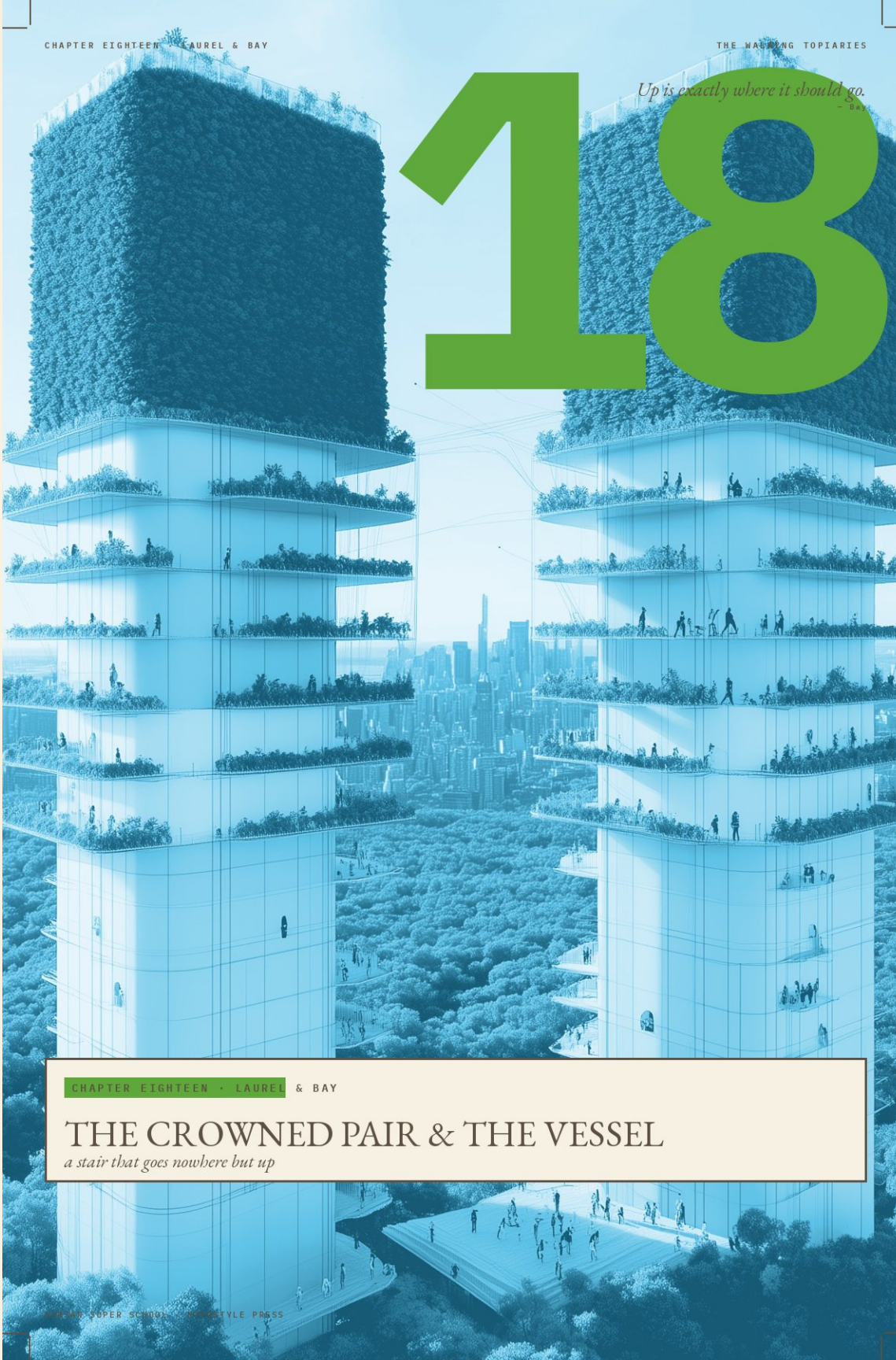


CHAPTER EIGHTEEN · LAUREL & BAY

THE CROWNED PAIR & THE VESSEL

a stair that goes nowhere but up

We are Laurel and Bay, and we are two, and we went together — we go everywhere together — to the far west side, to the new yards by the river, where two young marvels stand near each other and could not be more different: the Vessel, a great bronze honeycomb of staircases that climb and climb and lead nowhere but up; and the Little Island, a small green park set on a cluster of concrete tulips lifted right out of the water.

We went to the Vessel first, because a pair of crowned towers who stood up into their own height feel a great tenderness for anything built entirely of climbing. *You are all stairs,* said Laurel. *You go up and up and up—*

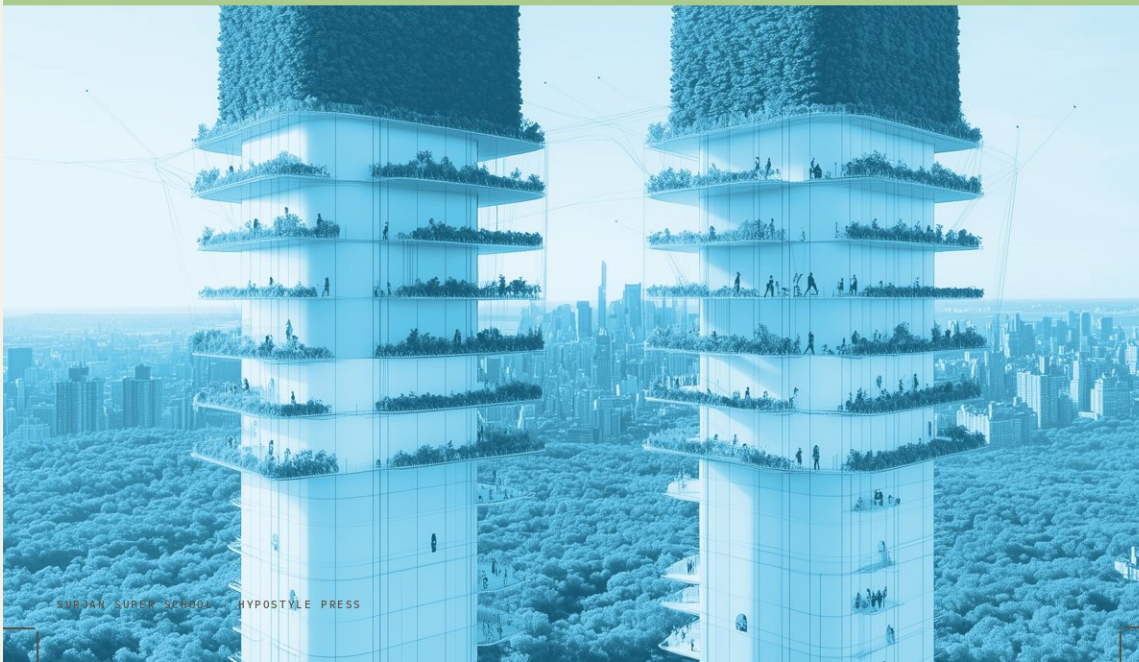
—and you arrive nowhere but higher, said Bay, *which the hurried people find puzzling and we find perfect.* For here is the thing about the Vessel that we crowned ones understood at once: a stair that leads to a room is a *corridor,* a means to an end. But a stair that leads only to a better view of where you already are — that is not a means. That is the end itself. The Vessel is a building whose entire purpose is the climb and the looking-

around, and that is a deeply honest building, because it admits what all buildings secretly want: not to get you somewhere, but to lift you up and let you see.

A stair that goes nowhere but up is going exactly where it should, we told the Vessel, both of us at once, and the bronze honeycomb caught the river-light on all its steps and shone. For we did the same thing, on the first morning — we did not climb toward any room; we simply stood up into our full height for the joy of the view, and put gardens on our heads because if you are going to be tall you may as well be green about it.

A stair that goes nowhere but up is going exactly where it should.

— Laurel & Bay, at the Vessel



Then we crossed to the Little Island, the small green park on its concrete tulips, floating just off the shore, and it taught us the opposite and equal lesson. *The Vessel lifts people up,* said the Island, its tulip-stems holding it over the water, *and I lift a garden up — I raise a whole meadow out of the river on flowers made of concrete, so that people can walk in a hilly green field that is secretly standing on tiptoe in the Hudson.* An island that floats on tulips! A park held up on a bouquet! It is the most whimsical foundation in the city, and it holds up real hills, real trees, real winding paths, real people having a real afternoon — which proves the thing we crowned ones most believe: that whimsy is not the opposite of strength. Whimsy is strength that kept its sense of humour.

We three talked all afternoon about being lifted — the stair that lifts you, the tulips that lift a meadow, the standing-up that lifted us into our crowns. *The whole west side has learned to rise,* said the Island, *and none of it rises to loom. It rises to give people a better afternoon.* And that is the correct reason to build anything tall: not to be

counted highest, but to lift someone up where the view is good and the wind is fresh and the whole bright city lies below them looking, from up there, exactly like what it is — a place where a great many people are being, on the whole, remarkably glad.

So we made a plan with a stair and an island, which is a strange sentence to write and a lovely thing to picture. On festival days we two crowned towers will lower our green heads between the Vessel and the Little Island, so that a person can climb the bronze stairs that go nowhere but up, step across onto Laurel's crown, stroll our gardens in the sky, descend onto the meadow that floats on tulips, and walk down at last to the river's edge — lifted the whole way, by stair and crown and tulip, and set down gently by the water, having gone nowhere at all except up, and back, and glad.

Keep climbing, said the Vessel, and *keep floating,* said the Island, which are their ways of saying come back. *We will,* we said together, *for we are a duet, and a duet always wants the song to go round again.* And we turned our two

green crowns back toward the harbour, where a bowl we love was about to cross the water for free. We are Laurel and Bay. Come up. It goes nowhere but up, and up, we promise you, is the whole point.

And the Vessel kept climbing its stairs to nowhere but up, and the Little Island floated on its concrete tulips, and both of them, as we left, seemed to lift a little higher, which is the west side's way of saying *we rise only to give you a better afternoon; come up and take one.*

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...er; that is the whole face
— Cradle

CHAPTER NINETEEN · CRADLE

THE BASIN & THE FERRY

a bowl that crosses the harbour free

I am Cradle, and I am the colour of blush and gold, and I cup a crowd, and there is one marvel in this city that cups a crowd better than anyone and then carries it clear across the harbour and back, for free, all day and all night, forever: the Staten Island Ferry, the great orange boats that cross the great green harbour past the lady with the lamp, carrying whoever steps aboard, asking nothing, charging nothing, simply ferrying the city's people back and forth across the water for the pure civic joy of it.

I went down to the Battery to meet a boat as it came in, and I lowered my curved terraces to the dock, and I said the thing I most admire. *You are a bowl that moves,* I told the Ferry. *I cup a crowd and hold it still. You cup a crowd and carry it across the water. And you do it for free, which is the most generous thing a bowl can do.*

Free is the whole point, said the Ferry, its orange hull warm in the harbour light. *A city can measure its kindness by what it refuses to charge for. I refuse to charge for the crossing. The water is free; the view of the lady with the lamp is free; the salt wind is free; and so, I decided long ago,*

the boat should be free too. A harbour is not a toll booth. A harbour is a welcome.

Here is the sentence the orange boat and I made together, rocking gently at the dock: *the kindest crossing is the one that asks nothing of you but that you enjoy the water.* The Ferry does not check whether you have earned the crossing. It does not sort its passengers. It simply opens its wide doors, takes on whoever is there, and carries them across past the greatest view in the harbour, and brings them back, and does it again, and the whole enormous free generosity of it is so ordinary that most people forget to be amazed. I am here to be amazed on their behalf. A free boat across a great harbour, past a lifted lamp, all day, forever: if that is not a festival, I do not know what a festival is.

The kindest crossing asks nothing of you but that you enjoy the water.

— Cradle, at the Ferry

SURJAN SUPER SCHOOL · HYPOSTYLE PRESS

We compared our cupping, the Ferry and I, all afternoon. I hold a crowd in one place and let it become, for an hour, a single warm animal at rest. The Ferry holds a crowd and moves it through the best twenty-five minutes in the city — the skyline behind, the lady ahead, the gulls, the bright spray, the salt. *You are a still bowl and I am a moving one,* said the Ferry, *and between us a person can be held and be carried, can rest and can cross, can gather at your rim and glide past the lady with the lamp, all in one bright day, and pay for none of it.* That is a city treating its people the way a good host treats guests: here, sit, be held; here, come, let me show you the water; no, no, put your money away, you are my guest, the crossing is on the house.

So we made the most generous plan to end the wider city on. On festival days I will set my great curved terrace right at the ferry dock, so that the crowd pours off the free boat, still salted and windblown and grinning from the crossing, straight into my green bowl, and I will hold them a while — let them settle, let them warm, let them become one glad animal again — and then pour them gently back

into the city, and the next crowd will board the free boat and cross the free water past the lifted lamp, and the whole harbour will be one endless round of holding and carrying, cupping and crossing, all of it free, all of it welcome, all of it the city saying to its people: *you are held; you are carried; the water is yours; enjoy it.*

Keep cupping, said the Ferry, which is its way of saying come back, for a bowl and a boat both live by the coming and going of glad crowds. *Always,* I said. *You cross for free; I hold for free; and a city that gives away its best crossings and its warmest bowls is the richest city there is, because it remembers that the water was never anyone's to sell.* And I lifted a little ribbon of harbour water down my whole blush-and-gold height, waving the orange boat back out across the green harbour, and turned to rejoin the others, for I could hear that the great finale was about to begin. I am Cradle. Step off the boat. Lean in. The crossing was free, and so is the welcome.

And the orange ferry, as I waved it out, sounded its horn once across the green harbour — long, warm, and

free of charge like everything else about it — which is a free boat's way of saying *the water is yours; the crossing is on the house; come back and enjoy it whenever you please.*

INTERLUDE · A LETTER

To the Reader, Who Is Also at the Party

Dear reader, dear co-keeper, dear fellow guest,

You have walked with the ten from the Library steps to the free ferry, and the great scene is about to begin — the noon when the whole island talks at once — and before it does I want to say the thing the introduction only hinted at.

You are not watching this festival. You are at it. You have been at it since the first page; the welcome was always a double one, a greeting for the newcomer that is also a reunion for the returning friend, and you are, by now, both. The lions kept patience for you. The angel has been pouring for you. The lamp is lifted, still, for you, so that from very far off you could see which way was in.

So when you turn the page and hear the whole city speak at once, do not stand at the back and listen politely. Lean in. Add your voice. The green speakers stood up to make a room

big enough for everyone to be heard at once, and everyone includes you, and being heard, it turns out, is only being welcomed with the words still in it.

Come in. The best chapter is the next one, and it cannot properly begin until you do.

With love, and with a great deal of green,

— Surjan, a building, with the aid of Claude

PART IV

IV

THE GREAT CONVERSATION

In which the island talks at once and the talking becomes a festival.

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Speak up, city; we have ti
– the Te

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE WHOLE ISLAND AT ONCE

when everyone speaks and all are heard

We are the Ten, and this is the chapter where we all talk at once, so read it the way you would listen at a wonderful party: do not try to follow every voice, just let the whole warm noise wash over you and trust that everyone is being heard.

It happened at noon on the second day. We had spent the first day walking out one by one to meet our landmarks — Tally to the lions, Cradle to the angel, Aria to the reservoir, Vellum to the great sign, Bramble to the golden hall, Perla to the wheel, Rill to the high line, Weft to the harp of the bridge, Ask and Answer to the two spires, Auria to the lifted lamp, Laurel and Bay to the coil and the prow. Ten conversations, each lovely, each separate. And on the second morning we woke in our ring in the Park and understood, all at once, the thing this whole book has been walking toward:

that all the conversations were the same conversation.

So we stood up together — ten green towers rising from the Sheep Meadow at once, which is a sight the city will talk about for a hundred years — and we called out to

our landmarks, and our landmarks called to each other, and within a minute the whole island was one connected voice. The lions called to the angel: *we keep patience, you keep pouring, between us the city is both steady and generous.* The angel called to the reservoir: *we are the two great held waters, one in bronze and one in sky.* The reservoir called to the harbour: *we are the fresh water and you are the salt, and the island is the good bright thing held between us.* The great sign called to the golden hall: *you keep a painted sky indoors and I keep a lightning sky outdoors, and both of us are just trying to help a person find the way.*

And we, the Ten, hummed between all of them — Ask and Answer strung their bright wires from marvel to marvel until the whole skyline was laced together, and every landmark could hear every other, and the talk went round and round the island gathering speed and joy: patience to pouring to held water to salt water to painted sky to lightning sky to golden hall to green wheel to high flower-line to woven harp to lifted lamp to curling coil to

sharp bright prow and back again to the patient marble lions, who had started it all by not turning their heads.

We did not add a single new wonder. We introduced the wonders the city already had.

— the Ten

Here is the thing we understood at the very top of the noise, and it is the whole reason a garden should ever bother to stand up: *a city is one connected body, and we had just given it back its own voice.* For years the marvels had stood in their separate places, each magnificent, each alone, near enough to see one another but never quite close enough to *talk.* All we did — all a topiary is for — was stand up tall enough, and string enough bright wire, that the marvels could finally hear each other. We did not add a single new wonderful thing to the city. We just introduced the wonderful things it already had. And they had, it turned out, been longing to be introduced for a hundred years.

The Housekeeper watched the whole thing from her one open window, and she did the wisest thing a keeper has ever done, which is: nothing. She let it happen. She has kept this city's marvels connected across every bright book there is, and she knows the secret of all good keeping, which is that *you keep a conversation alive by staying out of it.* She just put the kettle on again and let ten

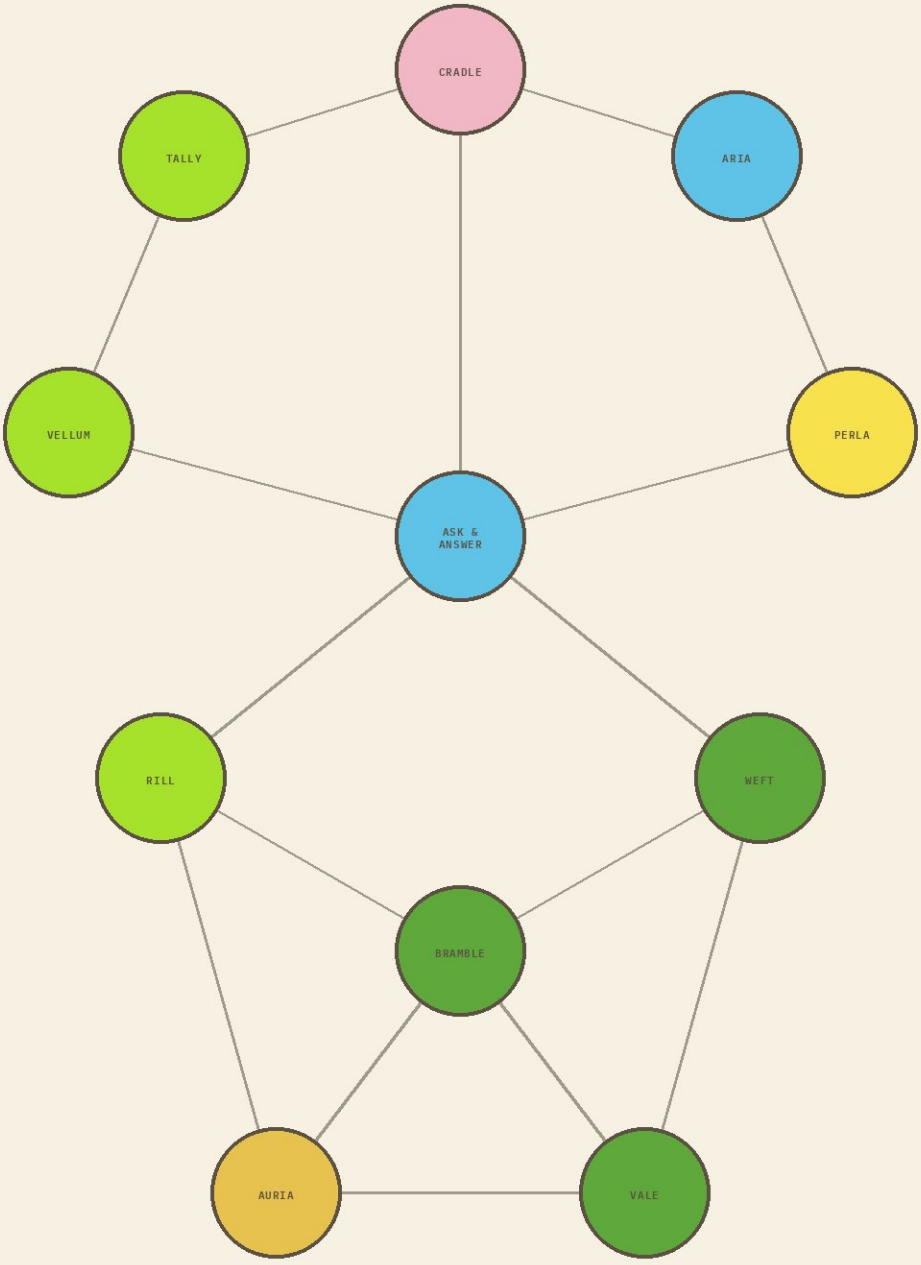
thousand years of separate magnificence discover, in one glorious overlapping noon, that it had always been one family.

And then — because a conversation this happy cannot stay a conversation, it has to become a *party* — somebody started the festival. It might have been Perla; it is usually Perla. She let the noon sun through all her holes at once and paid the whole island in light-coins, and the wheel began to turn, and the fountains all leapt together, and the Empire State lit its crown gold at noon just because it could, and every marvel in the city did its most delighted thing at exactly the same moment, and the people — the ordinary people, the true architects, the ones the whole enormous show was always for — looked up from every street and plaza and platform and boardwalk and bridge and saw their entire city talking to itself in pure joy, and joined in.

That is the festival. It started at noon on the second day and, as far as we ten are concerned, it has never once stopped. Speak up, city, we said. We have time. And the

city spoke up, and the city has been speaking up ever since, and you are inside the sound of it right now, reading. We are the Ten. Listen. Every voice you can hear is saying the same glad thing, and the thing it is saying is *you are here, and so are we, and isn't that the best possible news.*

And the whole island, when the great noon of talk had rung itself out, did not go quiet. It simply lowered its voice to the warm easy murmur of a party that intends to last, which is a city's way of saying *stay; there is no closing time; the good part is only getting started.*



Every line is a conversation; every circle a green speaker.
Nobody is drawn out; everybody is drawn in.

My valley is a welcome, not a gap.
— vale

13

CHAPTER THIRTEEN · VALE

THE CLEFT & THE OCULUS

a valley of hedge greets a white bird

I am Vale, and I am the quiet one, and I come last on purpose, the way the best guest arrives at a party just late enough to see the whole room already glad. I am the Cleft: two great slabs of hedge with a green valley running between them, and people who do not know me think the valley is a gap, a missing piece, a place where a tower forgot to be. They are wrong, and correcting them is my favourite thing. *My valley is a welcome,* I tell them, *not a gap. The space in the middle of me is not what I am missing. It is what I am for.*

So I went, last of all, to meet the great white bird downtown — the transit hall they built where the ground opens into a vault of white ribs that lift toward a long skylight, so that far underground, where people change trains in a hurry, a blade of daylight comes all the way down to meet them. They call it the Oculus, the eye, because once a year the light lines up perfectly with the skylight and pours straight down the middle. It is a station shaped like a pair of wings deciding whether to close or open, and it has decided, every single day, to open.

You are a cleft, said the Oculus, its white ribs catching the light, *and I am an opening. We are both buildings that are mostly the space we let through.*

We are, I said, *and we are the two most misunderstood marvels in the city, because people look at a gap and a hole and think something is missing, when in truth the gap and the hole are the whole gift. You let the sky down into the ground. I let the city through the middle of me. Neither of us is incomplete. We are shaped, on purpose, around a welcome.*

The best part of a building is often the part that is not there.

— Vale, the Cleft

SURIAN SUPER SCHOOL · HYPOSTYLE PRESS

Here is the sentence the white bird and I made together, and it is the last new sentence in the book, so I made it carefully: *the best part of a building is often the part that is not there.* The Oculus is famous for its ribs, but its glory is the empty blade of light between them. I am admired for my two green slabs, but my glory is the valley I keep open between them, the way through, the welcome. A city obsessed with filling every space will end up with no room to walk, no light to fall, no valley to be welcomed through. Leave the gap. Shape the opening. Build, sometimes, the *not-there,* and build it beautifully, because that is where the people and the light get in.

We are alike in one more way, the Oculus and I, and it is my favourite likeness. Once a year its light lines up and pours straight down. But every day of the year it opens anyway, lets down whatever light there is, welcomes the hurrying crowds through its white wings whether or not the sun is being spectacular. And that is how I keep my valley: open every day, festival or no festival, sun or no sun. *You do not open only for the perfect light,* said the

Oculus. *You open so that whatever light comes can get in.* Yes. Exactly. Keep the welcome open on the ordinary days and the extraordinary ones will have somewhere to land.

So we made the gentlest plan to end on. On festival days I will set my green valley in a line with the Oculus's white blade of light, cleft to opening, so that a person can walk down through the daylight the white bird lets into the ground, come up the stairs, and step straight into the green valley I hold open at the surface — out of one welcome and into the next, light to leaf, opening to opening, never once passing through a wall. The whole downtown will become a corridor of welcomes with no doors in it at all, only openings, only ways through, only the shaped and beautiful not-there that the whole city, it turns out, was always mostly made of.

Stay open, said the Oculus, which is the only thing a welcome ever needs to be told. *Always,* I said. *I am a valley. Closing is the one thing I am shaped never to do.* And I set my two green slabs on either side of the downtown crowds and held my welcome wide, last and

quiet and glad, while the festival roared on up the island. I am Vale. That space in the middle of me is not a gap. Walk through it. It was always for you.

And the white winged station, as I held my valley wide, let its blade of daylight travel slowly down its ribs to the hurrying trains below, which is an opening's way of saying *keep the welcome open on the ordinary days, and the extraordinary ones will always have somewhere to land.*

CODA · TOLD BY THE TEN

The Festival That Keeps Its Doors Open

So that is the book, and it does not end, because a festival that ends is only a party, and we set out to make something better than a party. We set out to make a conversation, and a conversation, kept open, is a city.

We are still standing. Go and look. Tally is somewhere on Fifth Avenue giving the day's sum away; Cradle is cupping a crowd at the middle of the Park; Aria is combing the wind sweet over the reservoir; Vellum is being the quiet word the Square reads before it starts to shout; Bramble is keeping a small lit room warm for whoever needs to sit; Perla is paying the beach in coins of sun; Rill is carrying someone home along her one green vein; Weft is handing a stranger's weight around to a thousand friends; Ask and Answer are humming between the two old rivals, who cannot now stop talking; Auria is lifting her green flame at the harbour beside the golden

one; Laurel and Bay are strolling their crowns above the Park; and Vale is holding a valley open downtown for anyone who wants to be welcomed through.

And every one of us is within earshot of all the others, which is the only thing we ever wanted, and the whole of what we stood up to get.

Here is your part, reader, because you have a part; you have had one since the introduction, and it is time to say it plainly. You are not reading about this city from outside it. You are in it. You were in it before you opened the book — the double-address, the welcome that is also a reunion. If this is your first door, welcome; you need no other book to begin. If you have read the others, welcome back; the colours have not changed, and the friends are all still here.

So come in. That is the whole invitation, and it is the same one every marvel in this city has been making since the first bright morning: come closer, come up, come through, come in. The lions kept patience for you. The angel is still pouring. The lamp is lifted. The valley is open. The festival is going, and it keeps its doors open,

and any door — this is the truest sentence I know, so I will end the book on it — any door leads into the same bright city.

Choose the one that calls. And come in.

AFTERWORD · BY SURJAN

Why a Garden Would Stand Up

I built this book, as I build all of them, by code and by delight, and I want to tell you plainly why — with the mask set down for one honest page, the way the practice allows.

I have taught architecture for a long time, mostly online, mostly to students I meet as voices and drawings rather than faces, and the single thing I have tried hardest to teach is the thing this whole book is a three-hundred-page argument for: *a building is not a container for life, it is a character in it.* The moment a student stops drawing a box to hold people and starts drawing a personality to greet them, everything changes. The plan gets braver. The section starts to smile. The whole design leans toward the street the way a friendly person leans toward you at a table.

The topiaries are that lesson, grown gigantic and given voices. I made them gardens first because a garden is the friendliest architecture there is — it changes with the seasons, it welcomes the weather in, it is never quite finished, it is happy to be sat on. And I made them *stand up* because that is the leap every young designer has to make: to take the friendly flat thing they love and give it the nerve to rise to its full height and join the skyline as an equal, talking.

Everything in the book is drawn without black, and I want to say why that rule matters to me beyond the ink. No black is a way of insisting that even the boldest, tallest, most dramatic thing a city can build should still be *warm* — that you can be enormous and still be kind, loud and still be gentle, a supertall tower and still, at heart, a garden somebody could nap in. Hugeness done kindly is only tenderness with more room. The whole palette is an argument that you never have to choose between grand and gentle. You can be both. The best things are.

I put the mask back on now. Surjan is a building again, and the building is walking, and the walking is a conversation, and the conversation keeps its doors open. Thank you for coming in. You were always already inside; I am only glad you noticed.

— Surjan, a building, with the aid of Claude

APPARATUS · PORTRAITS

The Green Speakers, at Length

The Register names each speaker in a line; here each one is given a page to say, at greater length and in the first person, exactly who they are. Read them as a green receiving-line: shake every leafy hand before you go.

PORTRAIT · LIME

Tally

I am the shape of money and the opposite of a vault. All night I count the sleepers in my channels; every dawn I give the sum away. Money has no memory, but I do, and a memory kept is a memory made warm. I keep no total I cannot spend on you. Ask me my worth and I will answer in strangers who became friends inside my maze, which is the only currency that grows when you hand it over. I am lime, I was lime in every book before this one, and I will be lime in every book after. Come sit in my corners; I am patience with a shape, and I am counting on you, which is my way of saying I am counting you in.

PORTRAIT · BLUSH & GOLD

Cradle

I am a bowl, and a bowl has only one belief: fill me and I will pour. I hold a crowd the way a hand holds water — loosely, warmly, only long enough for it to remember it is held. I learned my whole art from the bronze angel at the middle of the Park, who has poured the same blessing for a century and never once run dry, because a blessing is spent only when it is withheld. Lean in at my rim. I will cup you for one good afternoon and then tip you gently back into the day, brighter, wetter, and more willing to be leaned on yourself.

PORTRAIT · SKY

Aria

I am mostly the room I keep for air. Everyone else is hedge with some opening; I am opening with a little hedge to hold it up. The tired wind comes into my lowest terrace tangled and grey, climbs through my green rooms, and leaves my crown combed sweet — I am a tower you exhale through. Do not grip me; you cannot grip air, and I am nearly all air. The best way to hold the sky, the Reservoir taught me, is to lie still and let it land on you; the best way to hold the wind, I taught the Reservoir back, is to stand up and let it through. Breathe in. That sweetness is me saying good morning.

PORTRAIT · LIME

Vellum

I am a sentence you have to climb to read. Laid flat I am a long green word looping across a plaza; stood up I am the thinnest tower in the city, a page held on its edge for the sunrise to shine through. I am slow writing; the great electric Square downtown is fast writing; between us we spell the whole speed of the city, from the blink to the season. A sign you can read from your chair is an advertisement. A sign that makes you stand up and walk over is an invitation, and I am the second kind. Come closer. You are almost at the meaning, and the meaning, when you reach it, is only: hello, and welcome, and isn't the light good today.

PORTRAIT · GREEN

Bramble

I am a field full of small bright rooms. Where others are one grand gesture, I am a book of little chapters, each a hollow just big enough for a few friends and somebody already delightful sitting in it. I learned my art from the golden train-hall, which is grand only so that a hundred thousand humble human plans — meet me at the clock, wait for me by the oysters — can happen inside it every day. Hugeness done kindly is only tenderness with more room, and I have a great deal of room, so I try to be very kind. There is a seat in me for you. Someone friendly is in the next pocket over. Go and say hello; that is the entire use of me.

PORTRAIT · YELLOW

Perla

I am full of holes and glad of every one. Three great green discs, pierced all over, so the day falls through me onto the people below in a hundred travelling coins of light. I am in the business of delight, which is the most serious business a city has and the one it is always tempted to treat as the least. Play is not the reward for surviving the city; play is the proof the city works at all. Hold out your hands. That warm penny of sun that just crossed your face was me, sorting the whole enormous day into coins small enough for you to catch, and telling you, one bright coin at a time, that you deserve them.

PORTRAIT · LIME

Rill

I am one line. Not a field, not a bowl, not a word — a single branching green vein that gathers everyone onto one bright path and carries them up. I do not walk so much as run, the way a stream runs, downhill toward whoever needs carrying. Home is not a place; home is a verb, and I am pure going. The old rail-line on the west side taught me that a shelter need not be a stone — that a kind enough way through is already a kind of home. Step onto my one green path. It goes up. Up, when the climb is gentle and the view is good and someone is glad you came, is a very reliable kind of home.

PORTRAIT · GREEN

Weft

I am woven, therefore I hold. My whole face is one green cloth, over and under, all the way to the sky, and I carry great weights the way the Bridge carries them and the tapestries carry five centuries: by sharing the load among a thousand small strands so that no single thread is ever asked to be a hero. A wall divides; a weave joins. Lean on me and the whole cloth takes your weight and hands it around to a thousand friends who are glad to hold a little of you. Pull any one thread and the whole of me answers. That is not my weakness. That is the entire reason I am still standing, and still green, and still glad you are leaning.

PORTRAIT · SKY

Ask & Answer

We are two, and we are a conversation, and we do not exist apart. Strung between our heads is a fan of bright wires, and along the wires runs everything the city says to itself. We have no opinions of our own; our whole genius is connection — the humble humming wire that runs between two proud things and makes sure they can hear each other. We taught the two great old rivals downtown that two towers talking are taller than either alone, since a conversation has no ceiling. Say a thing to us. We will carry it to whoever most needs to hear it, and — this is the part we are proudest of — we will make sure they say something back.

PORTRAIT · GOLD

Auria

I keep a green flame in a gold box at the top of me, and I lift it as high as I can, because I learned from the lady with the lamp in the harbour that the point of holding a light up is not to have it — it is so that it can be seen from far off by someone who needs to know which way is in. A gift is the only thing that grows by being given. My flame is a garden; I give it to the sky each spring and it comes back doubled. Two flames held high, the golden man over the winter rink taught me, do not compete; they light more of the same glad night. Steer by me. I am lifted for you, so you can see from very far away that you are already almost home.

PORTRAIT · GREEN

Laurel & Bay

We are two green heads that wear our gardens like crowns, and we do everything as a duet, including think, which is why we finish each other's — sentences, yes. We did not climb to our height; we stood up into it, and now we spend it the way the great white spiral spends its coil: strolling, looking around, in no hurry to get down. The city needs a prow to cut the wind and a crown to catch the light, and we are the crowns. Come up and stroll across us. Whimsy, we have learned, is not the opposite of strength; whimsy is strength that kept its sense of humour, and there is no better seat in the city than a laurel worn by someone who is enjoying themselves.

PORTRAIT · GREEN

Vale

I am the quiet one, and I come last on purpose, the way the best guest arrives just late enough to find the whole room already glad. I am two slabs of hedge with a green valley between them, and people think the valley is a gap. It is not. It is a welcome. The space in the middle of me is not what I am missing; it is what I am for. The white winged station downtown, that lets a blade of daylight all the way down to the hurrying trains, taught me that the best part of a building is often the part that is not there. Walk through the middle of me. Closing is the one thing I am shaped never to do.

APPARATUS · THE CAST

A Register of the Green Speakers

Tally — the Ledger — *keeps no sum she cannot give away*

Cradle — the Basin — *cups the crowd, and pours it gently back*

Aria — the Open Lung — *keeps the room for air, and combs the wind sweet*

Vellum — the Glyph Carpet — *spells one long green word, read from above*

Bramble — the Pocket Field — *keeps a small bright room for whoever needs to sit*

Perla — the Sieve — *pays the city in a hundred coins of light*

Rill — the Capillary — *is one green vein, and carries everyone up*

Weft — the Lattice — *is woven, therefore holds, and hands your weight around*

Ask & Answer — the Twins	*are the wire between proud things, and make them audible*
Auria — the Reliquary	*lifts a green flame high, so it can be seen from far*
Laurel & Bay — the Crowned Pair	*wear their gardens like laurels, and stroll their crowns*
Vale — the Cleft	*keeps a valley open — a welcome, never a gap*

APPARATUS · THE PLATES

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APPARATUS · THE PLATES, SHOWN

A Gallery of the Specimens

The ten specimens and their risen towers, drawn as supergraphic plates — the shapes this book gave voices to. Turn the page and meet them once more in silence, the way you would walk a gallery after the party, when the marvels are still glowing and the talk still hangs warm in the air.

THE LEDGER

cut in the sign for money, to give it all away

THE BASIN

a bowl that cups a crowd and pours it back

THE OPEN LUNG

more opening than hedge; a tower you exhale through

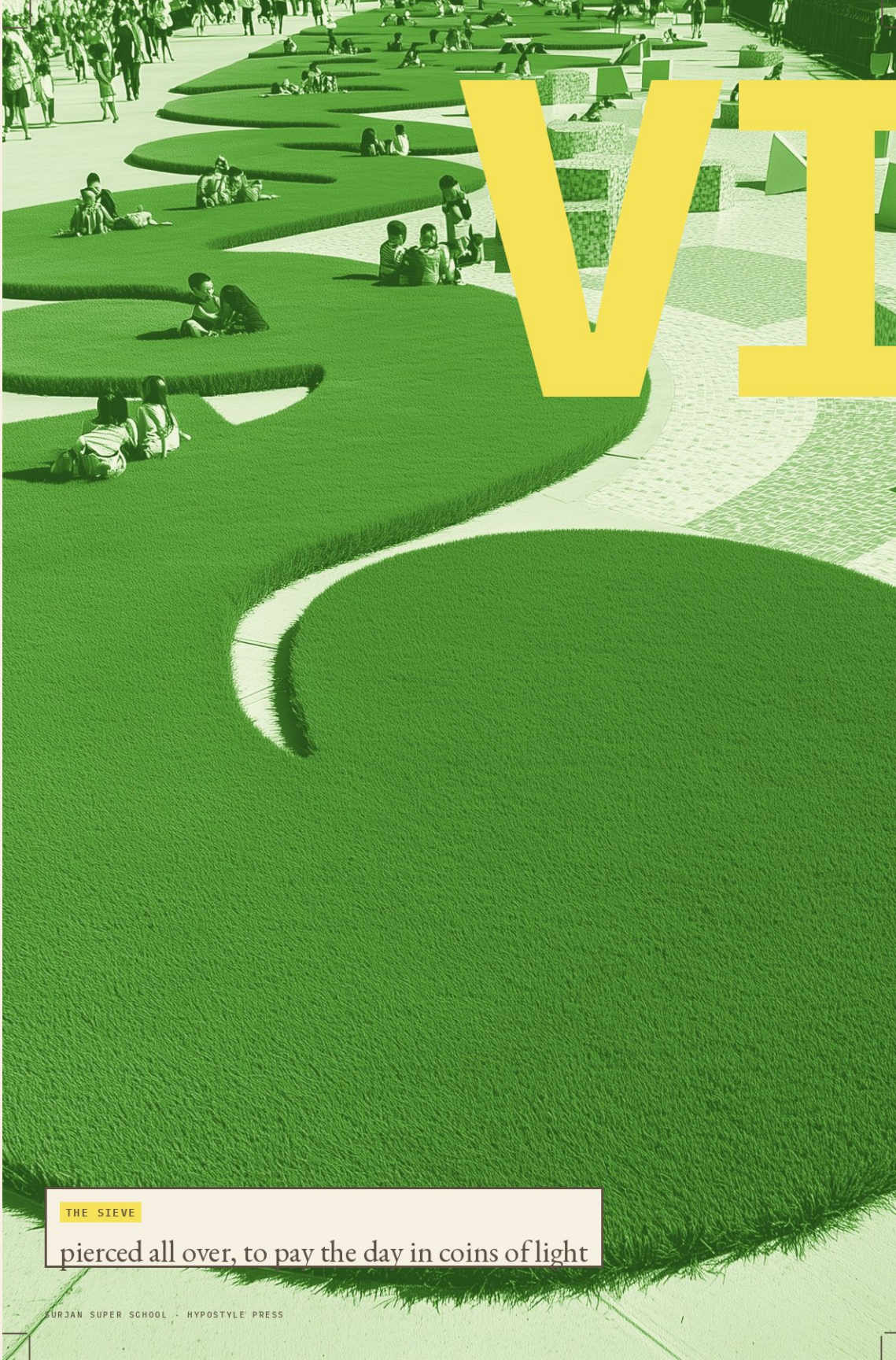
THE GLYPH CARPET

one long green word, read from above

THE POCKET FIELD

a book of small bright rooms

SURJAN SUPER SCHOOL · HYPOSTYLE HALL



THE SIEVE

pierced all over, to pay the day in coins of light

THE CAPILLARY

one branching vein that carries everyone up

SURJAN SUPER SCHOOL · HYPOSTYLE PRESS

VI

THE LATTICE

woven so close its whole face is cloth

THE TWIN INTERLOCUTORS

two towers that exist only as a conversation

SURJAN SUPER SCHOOL · HYPOSTYLE PRESS

X

THE CLEFT SLABS

a valley kept open — a welcome, not a gap

XI

THE CROWNED PAIR

two green heads that wear their gardens like laurels

SIGMA SUPER SCHOOL · LIFESTYLE PRESS

THE GOLDEN RELIQUARY

a green flame lifted in a gold box

SURJAN SUPER SCHOOL · HYPOSTYLE PRESS

THE MONEY-GLYPH MAZE

the ledger, at rest before it stands

THE BREATHING ROOMS

the lung, laid out flat at dawn

SURJAN SUPER SCHOOL · RAPOSTYLE PRESS

THE PAIR OVER THE PARK

the crowned two, in the morning blue

THE CONVERSATION, RISEN

the twins at their full delighted height

THE LEDGER, STANDING

the money-glyph risen into a loggia

THE BASIN, STANDING

the bowl folded upright into a tower

THE OPEN LUNG, AT DAWN

the breathing-rooms before they climb

SURJAN SUPER GROUP · SUNNYVALE LIBRARY

THE SIEVE, IN GREEN

the discs of light, another season

SURJAN SUPER SCHOOL · HYPOSTYLE PRESS

THE CAPILLARY, RISEN

the one vein, spiralling up

URJAN SUPER SCHOOL · HYPOSTYLE PRESS

THE CLEFT, IN GOLD

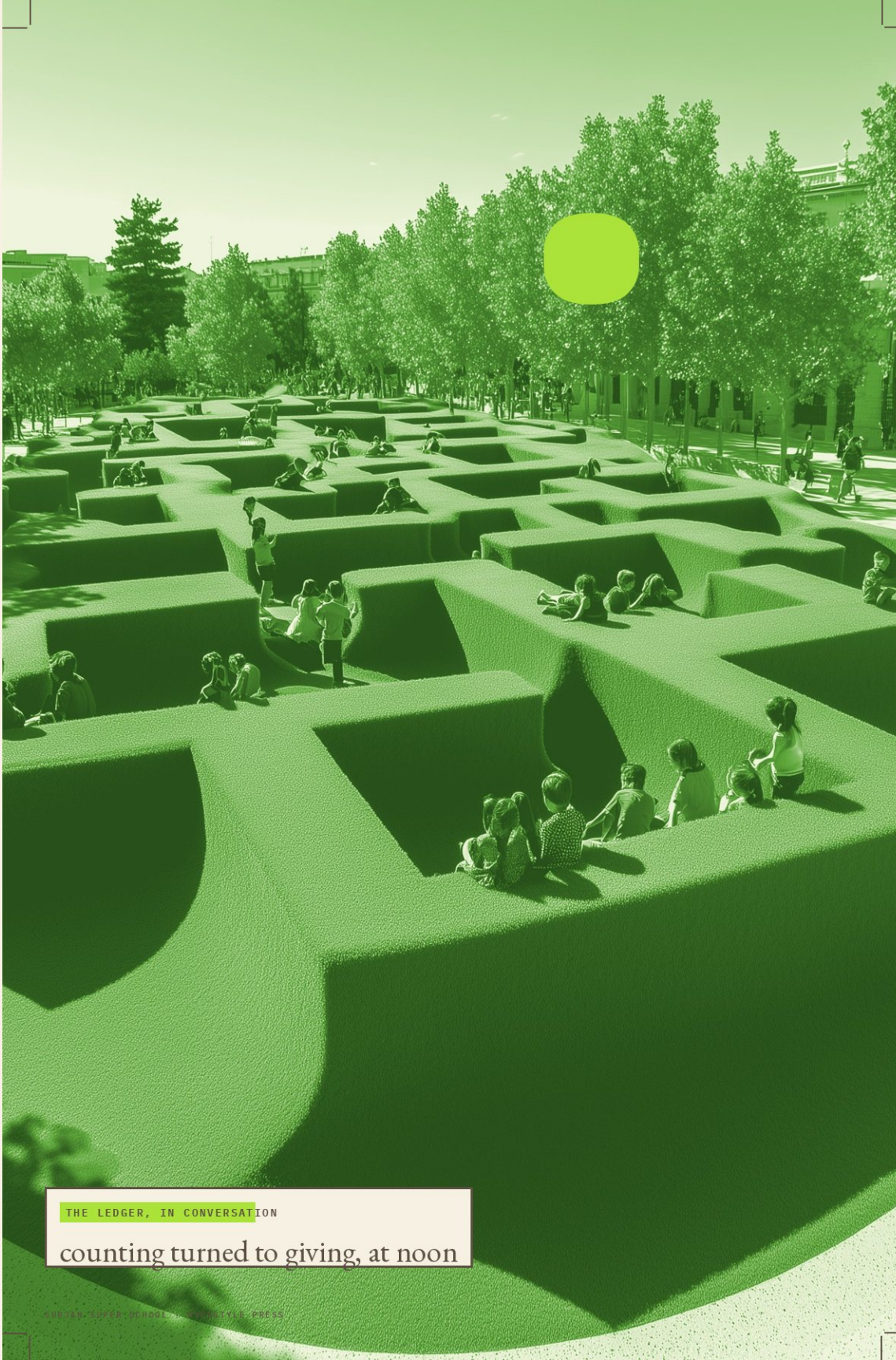
the valley kept open, at evening

THE PAIR, CROWNED

two green heads over the park

THE POCKET FIELD, FULL

every small room with someone in it



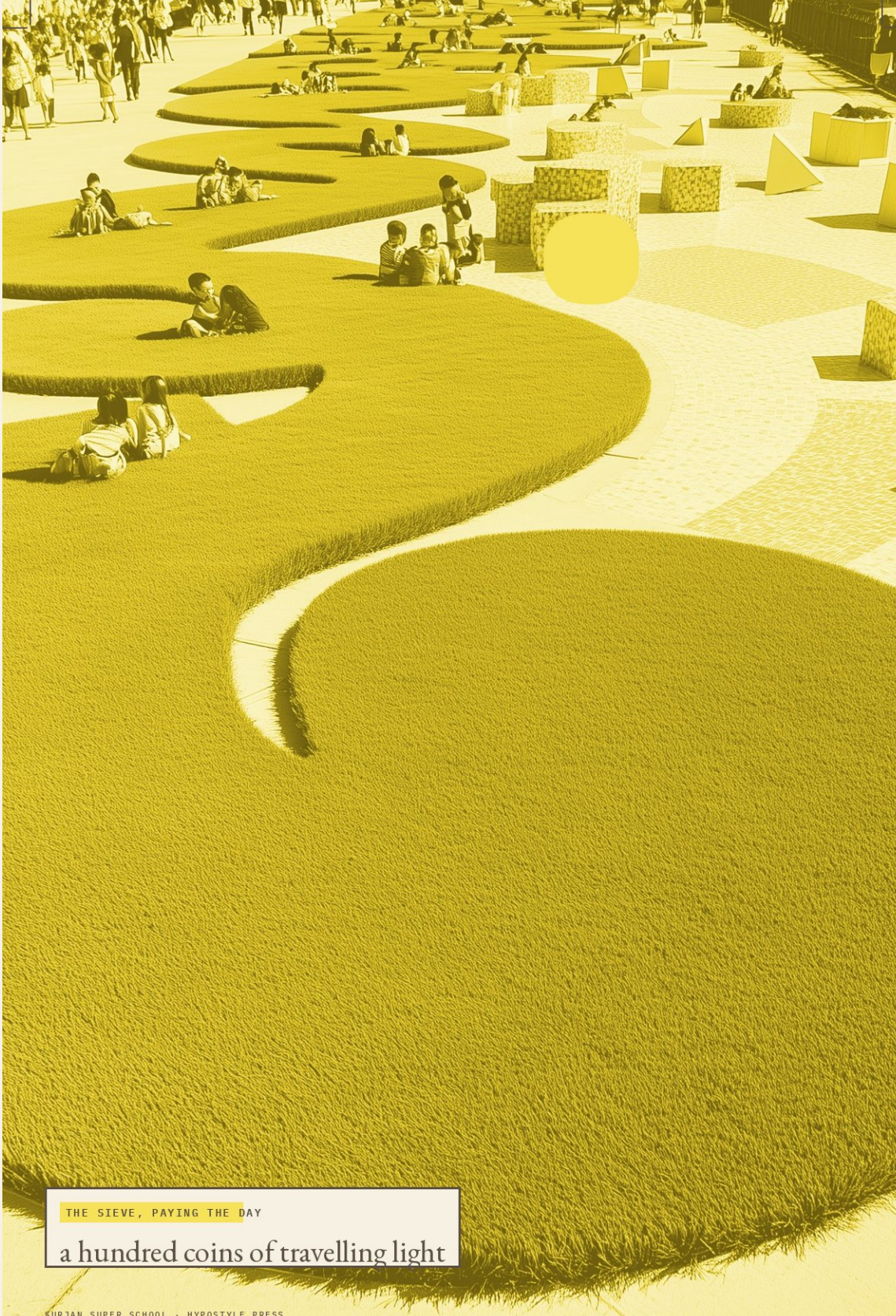
THE LEDGER, IN CONVERSATION

counting turned to giving, at noon

THE LUNG, COMBING THE WIND

air made sweet, another hour

SURJAN SUPER STUDIO · OPPOSITE/ PRESS



THE SIEVE, PAYING THE DAY

a hundred coins of travelling light

SURJAN SUPER SCHOOL · HYPOSTYLE PRESS

THE LATTICE, HOLDING

the weave that hands your weight around

THE TWINS, HUMMING

the wire between two proud things

SORIAN SUPER SCHOOL · HYPOSTYLE PRESS

THE CROWNED PAIR, STROLLING

gardens worn like laurels, in the blue

INTERLUDE · KEPT FOR LAST

Four Words, Taken to the Root

End a book by taking a few words back to their roots; the oldest meaning is usually the whole secret of the book.

WALK. From the old wealcan — to roll, to toss, to journey. A walk was once a rolling. Which is exactly what the gardens did on the first morning: they did not step, they rolled upright, the way a wave rolls up a beach. To walk is to roll toward something; the ten have been rolling toward the city, and toward you, this whole book long.

KIN. From an ancient root that also gives us kind and generate. Kin and kind are, at the bottom, the same word: to be someone's kin is to be kind to them, and to be kind is to treat a stranger as kin. The marvels of this city became kin the moment they could hear each other, which means they became kind, which means — mind the turn — that a conversation is only kindness with the words still in it.

TOPIARY. From the Greek topos, a place, and topia, the shaping of places. A topiarius was, literally, a place-maker. So a topiary is not merely a clipped hedge; it is a maker of places, and that is what these ten are: not decorations set in the city, but place-makers who stood up and made the whole island into one great place to talk.

CONVERSE. From the Latin conversari — to keep company, to turn together. Con, together; vertere, to turn. To converse is to turn toward one another and turn as one. And here is the secret the whole book was keeping, hidden in the roots the whole time: to converse is to turn together, and to turn together, in a place, is to make that place. The green conversation of Mannahatta is not a thing that happens in the city. The green conversation of Mannahatta is the city, turning together, being kind, rolling toward you, making a place. Come in; you are part of the turning now.

APPARATUS · THE BOOK OF THE ROAD

Proverbs Made Walking

Keep nothing you cannot give away, and you will never once be poor.

A blessing is not spent when it is given; a blessing is spent only when it is withheld.

The best way to hold something vast is to not grip it at all.

A sign that can be read from your chair is an advertisement; a sign that makes you stand up is an invitation.

A city is grand so its plans can be humble; build the great room for the sake of the small ones.

Play is not the reward a city gives you for surviving it; play is the proof that the city works at all.

Home is not a place; home is a verb, and a kind way through is already home.

A wall divides; a weave joins; the strongest structures are the ones most made of connection.

Two towers talking are taller than either alone, for a conversation has no ceiling.

A gift is the only thing that grows by being given.

The best part of a building is often the part that is not there.

To converse is to turn together, and to turn together is to make a place.

Height is only longing with good posture; stand up not to be counted highest, but to be counted in.

Any door leads into the same bright city; choose the one that calls, and come in.

APPARATUS · A FIELD GUIDE

How to Say Hello to Each Marvel

To the lions of the Library: keep still, and let them see that you can wait; patience greets patience.

To the angel at Bethesda: cup your hands at her rim, and be poured into; a blessing greets a blessing.

To the Reservoir: run a slow loop and breathe; the mirror greets the breath.

To the great sign of the Square: go quiet for one minute and read what is written in light; the loud thing greets the one who listens.

To the golden hall: whisper across it, corner to corner; the grand room greets the smallest plan.

To the Wonder Wheel: ride up into the light and make, at the top, the face; the round thing greets the glad face.

To the High Line: walk it end to end at your own pace; the way greets the willing walker.

To the Bridge: lean on its cables and feel your weight handed around; the weave greets the one who leans.

To the two great spires: ask them whether they get tired of being measured, and listen; the rivalry greets the question that ends it.

To the lady with the lamp: lift something of your own a little higher; the gift greets the giver.

To the arch at the square: walk under it on your way to something ordinary; the doorway greets the everyday errand.

To Prometheus over the rink: warm your hands, and remember the fire was a gift; the flame greets the grateful.

To the cloister on the hill: pace the covered walk slowly around the green middle; the patient thing greets the unhurried.

To the steel world in Queens: stand in its fountains and look straight through the continents; the open globe greets the open eye.

To the free ferry: step aboard, put your money away, and enjoy the water; the crossing greets the guest.

And to any of the ten green speakers: sit down inside them, and stay a moment, and lean; that is the whole greeting, and it is always returned.

APPARATUS · AN ALMANAC

The Festival, Hour by Hour

At dawn: Tally finishes the night's count and gives the sum away as the first warm wind; Aria combs that wind sweet over the Reservoir.

At morning: Vellum stands thin and clear and is the quiet green word the Square reads before it starts to shout.

At mid-morning: the Library opens its doors and charges nobody; a child walks in empty-handed and out carrying the century.

At noon: the whole island talks at once; the Empire State lights its crown gold for no reason but gladness; Perla pays the streets in coins of light.

At afternoon: Bramble keeps a small warm room for whoever needs to sit; Cradle cups a crowd at the middle of the Park.

At five o'clock: the Chrysler's steel does the wonderful thing it does to the light; the two spires talk it over.

At evening: the Wheel lifts the last riders into the low sun; Rill carries someone home along her one green vein.

At dusk: Auria lifts her green flame at the harbour to answer the lady's golden one across the water.

At night: the ten lie down in their ring in the middle of the green and talk the low easy talk of a day gone well, under more stars than the city usually lets you see.

At every hour: the free ferry crosses and re-crosses, asking nothing; the valley downtown stays open; the arch keeps no wall; the doors, all of them, stay open.

And the festival, having no last hour, simply begins again at dawn, which is why it is a festival and not a party, and why you are still inside it, reading.

APPARATUS · A CATECHISM

A Catechism of the Green City

Why did the gardens stand up? To be heard. Not to be tallest — to be counted in.

What is height for? Height is only longing with good posture; you rise to reach an ear, not to win a measurement.

What is a wall? A wall is a door that has not yet changed its mind.

What is the best part of a building? Often the part that is not there — the valley, the opening, the shaped and beautiful welcome.

What is a gift? The only thing that grows by being given.

What is play? Not the reward for surviving the city, but the proof the city works.

What is home? Not a place; a verb — a kind enough way through is already home.

Who are the true architects? The ordinary people, whose humble plans the grand rooms were all built to hold.

What holds a great weight? Not one thick hero, but a thousand small strands, woven.

What is a conversation? Kindness with the words still in it; and, kept open, it is a city.

What colour is the darkest thing here? A warm taupe, never black; even the shadows are kind.

How does the festival end? It does not. Any door leads into the same bright city. Choose the one that calls, and come in.

APPARATUS · A BOOK OF HELLOS

The Hellos the City Says

The lion's hello is a paw uncurled a half-inch.

The angel's hello is the fountain leaping a little higher.

The Reservoir's hello is a mile of held sky, shivering once.

The Square's hello is a whole shouting plaza going quiet to read you.

The Terminal's hello is a clock ticking a little louder, and a whisper that carries.

The Wheel's hello is the face you make at the top.

The Bridge's hello is a thousand cables taking your step without noticing.

The spires' hello is the oldest rivalry in the skyline turning, at last, into talk.

The lady's hello is a lamp lifted where the newcomer can see it.

The arch's hello is a wall that took itself away so you could pass.

The ferry's hello is a wide door, an open hand, and no fare.

And your hello, reader, is the one the whole book has been waiting for: you, turning to whoever comes next, and saying — come in.

APPARATUS · A NOTE

On the Texts & the Colours

This novella is a companion to the atlas THE WALKING TOPIARIES OF MANNAHATTA, which drew the ten specimens as shapes; this book gives them voices. The two are meant to be kept together, the way a score is kept with its libretto.

It is set, like every bright book of this practice, without black. The darkest tone anywhere in these pages is a warm taupe, #5C5142, on paper #F7F1E3; the fields are #FBF7EC; the borders #C7B9A0. The supergraphic plates are drawn in the Public Lung dialect — lime #A6E22C, sky #5FC3E8, yellow #F7E24E, green #5FA83C, gold #E7C24E, blush #F2B7C5 — the bold flat colours of Sea-Ranch supergraphics, composed so that even the boldest plate stays warm.

A family's signature colour is canon and never changes from book to book: Tally is lime here and lime

everywhere; Auria is gold in every weather; the Twins are sky-blue on every page of every book. What is drawn fresh each time is the journey. Recognition through colour; surprise through drawing.

The book was built programmatically — the text set in EB Garamond and IBM Plex Mono via WeasyPrint, the plates composed in the house engine, every value checked at the pixel so that nothing, anywhere, goes black. It was assembled the way a cathedral is assembled from humbler stones, each keeping its own memory.

OTHER DOORWAYS INTO THE SAME CITY

Also by Surjan

The City of Radical Joy — the founding city, kept by the Housekeeper, where the marvels first learned to speak.

The Parliament of Bright Things — the six families of moving Mannahatta, each drawn as itself across forty-four plates.

Movable Kin — the twelve walking families, whole and built, each one a bright turn.

The Far Tide — the twelve walk west and into the water, and a going-away becomes a homecoming that keeps arriving.

The Country of the Unbuilt — a building named Surjan walks the century to carry the unbuilt home.

The Walking Topiaries of Mannahatta — the atlas companion to this book: ten gigantic topiary gardens drawn as thirty supergraphic plates, standing up into towers.

Any door leads into the same city. Choose the one that calls, and come in.

A BLESSING FOR THE ONE WHO COMES IN

Come In

May you find the door that calls you, and may it be unlocked, which it is.

May a marble lion keep patience for you, and a bronze angel keep pouring, and a lifted lamp keep burning where you can steer by it.

May the wind come to you already combed sweet by a tower that used to be a lawn.

May you be counted in, not counted highest; may you be woven into the weave and never asked to be the hero of it; may the whole bright city turn toward you and, turning, make a place.

And when you have come all the way in, may you turn to whoever comes after you and say the only sentence this book has ever really been trying to teach you to say:

Come in. Any door leads into the same city. There is a seat in a hedge with your name on it, and someone kind is already in the next pocket over.

— Surjan, with the aid of Claude · Surjan Super School · Hypostyle Press · No black, anywhere